



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE NEW AMBASSADOR
OF SWEDEN TO THE HOLY SEE****

Friday, 17 May 2002

Mr Ambassador,

With great pleasure I welcome you to the Vatican and receive the Letters of Credence appointing you Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Sweden to the Holy See. I am grateful for the kind greetings which you bring from His Majesty King Carl XVI Gustaf, and I would ask you to convey to His Majesty my heartfelt thanks and good wishes, which I extend as well to the Swedish Government and people, with the assurance of my prayers for the well-being of the nation.

My memories of Swedish hospitality have not faded since my visit in 1989, and I am pleased to recall the visit to the Vatican of His Majesty the King with Queen Silvia and Princess Victoria in 1999, on the occasion of the proclamation of Saint Bridget as Co-Patroness of Europe. Such visits undoubtedly helped to consolidate the cordial relations between Sweden and the Holy See which have deep historical roots and which will surely bear new fruit in the future.

I appreciate your remarks on building "a world in which co-operation, solidarity, respect for the individual and mutual understanding form the basis for attaining a just, peaceful, secure and humane international community"; for that is a goal which the Holy See shares with Sweden. At the turn of the new millennium, we witnessed as it were an extraordinary global acceleration of that quest for freedom which is one of the great dynamics of human history, and hopes were high that a new era of peace and stability might be possible. Yet events since then have shown that such a prospect will not be achieved without great wisdom and persevering effort. It is therefore all the more urgent that the international community should strive to build peace and stability on the basis of genuine justice and solidarity, not partisan interests or long-standing animosities. Otherwise, patterns of violence born of the world's profound imbalances will continue indefinitely;

and the dynamic of human hope rebels against such a prospect.

You have rightly spoken of basic values, values such as equality, freedom and tolerance. These are regarded as fundamental and are prized by all, very much so in your own country; and this is cause for great satisfaction. Yet, it is reasonable to ask what is the foundation of these values, and then we see that they derive from an understanding of the universality of human dignity. But we also see that in our world that universality is often ignored and even rejected. Herein is the contradiction which the Catholic Church seeks to point out and help peoples to overcome. For the danger is that, when these values are asserted and their foundation is denied, the values themselves are corrupted and run the risk of turning into their opposite. For example, when freedom is sundered from the universal truth of the human person, it sooner or later becomes a new kind of slavery, in which the law of the stronger will inevitably prevail.

We believe that all human beings are equal in dignity. This means that the weak – whatever form their weakness may take – are no less endowed with inalienable rights than are the strong. They may in fact find it more difficult to defend their rights or press their claims, but this does not change the basic truth that they are possessed of an equal dignity. Indeed, in the view of the Catholic Church, any society is to be judged ultimately on how well it protects its weakest members. This is an understanding drawn from the Bible itself, which insists that all human beings are created in the image of God (cf. *Gen 1:26*), an understanding deeply embedded in Swedish culture.

The seven hundredth anniversary of Saint Bridget provides a splendid occasion to focus more clearly upon the Christian heritage of Sweden, and to see that the values central to this heritage are also central to the new unity which Europe is striving to build. The search for a new European unity is complex, but it offers the hope of transcending the antagonisms of the past and breaking the cycle of relapse into violence; therefore it must be pursued. Yet if it is not based upon those fundamental values of which you speak, and if these are not in turn grounded upon a sense of the universality of human dignity, then it is likely that the search for European unity will prove disappointing. The Catholic community in your nation is small, but it too will continue to make a very positive contribution to the future that you have described as "just, peaceful, secure and humane".

Mr Ambassador, as you enter the diplomatic community accredited to the Holy See, I assure you that the offices of the Roman Curia will be ready to offer whatever assistance you may need in the performance of your high duties. May your mission serve to strengthen still further the bonds of understanding and cooperation between your nation and the Holy See. Upon you and the beloved people of Sweden I invoke the abundant blessings of Almighty God.

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