



The Holy See

***DISCOURS DU SAINT-PÈRE JEAN-PAUL II
AU NOUVEL AMBASSADEUR DU LIBAN PRÈS LE SAINT-SIÈGE,
S.Exc. M. YOUSSEF ARSANIOS À L'OCCASION DE LA
PRÉSENTATION DES LETTRES DE CRÉANCE****

Samedi 1er octobre 1994

Mr. Ambassador,

1. I am pleased to welcome Your Excellency at this ceremony for the presentation of the Letters accrediting you to the Holy See at the beginning of your mission as the Ambassador of Lebanon. At this moment I feel deep affection for the entire Lebanese nation, so much has this country been in my thoughts and prayers in recent years.

I thank you, Mr. Ambassador, for your words. You have deeply expressed the spirit in which your compatriots must build a safer and happier future after the years of suffering, whose wounds must still be healed.

Sensitive to the message from His Excellency the President of the Lebanese Republic, which you have conveyed to me, I ask you to express my sincere gratitude to him, together with my fervent wishes for himself, the Government and all the Lebanese people.

2. The long period of crisis Lebanon has undergone has caused widespread suffering that today has not yet been alleviated. Family members have been wounded, exiled from their land and homes; they must find the spiritual and material means to lead a more peaceful life. The return to normality of political social and economic life could reinforce the confidence necessary to overcome existing fears and, especially, to heal the still wounded hearts of the Lebanese people. I would like to say here that I am very close to your fellow citizens. I am familiar with their troubles and I share them. I also know that they have not ceased striving to re-establish completely your people's traditional ability to get along with one another, in fidelity to a past with a rich legacy of

culture and religious meaning and motivated by tenacity in all their undertakings. I can therefore assure you, Mr. Ambassador, that I gladly respond to the wish you yourself expressed. Yes, the Holy See has confidence in the Lebanese people and wishes to give all its support to their homeland so that their country may regain its full sovereignty.

3. We hope that Lebanon can rebuild all that has been destroyed and regain its vigorous national life through the service to its citizens provided by a free and independent State, which is able to guarantee respect for the basic rights of all society in every circumstance, as well as the economic growth advantageous to each.

These are primary conditions for the welfare of its inhabitants; and this welfare must be fully restored through the dialogue which you mentioned so frequently in your address, Mr. Ambassador. This means allowing everyone, in open dialogue, to take part freely in the nation's life. Generous solidarity, a typical quality of your people, will guarantee the necessary support to the most underprivileged. The school and university system will enable young people to receive a well rounded formation and to acquire useful skills for their personal future and for the community as a whole, in Lebanon's distinguished cultural tradition. I know that the members of the Catholic Church care deeply about serving their country and playing a responsible part in the country's social life, both through the involvement of individuals and through the work accomplished by the social and educational institutions of the various communities.

4. Circumstances have not allowed me to make the Pastoral Visit to Lebanon I had planned several months ago. I still hope to make this journey as soon as possible. I want to show my esteem and sympathy to all the religious communities to which the Lebanese people belong. In particular, through you today, I would like to address an affectionate message to the Lebanese Catholics who belong to the communities of various rites. At this moment they are preparing for the very important Synod, which will help the Catholic Church generously to renew her Gospel zeal and will contribute to deepening the fraternal dialogue with believers of all spiritual traditions, Christians and Muslims, with whom they share their daily life. I hope that the reflection, exchanges and prayers in preparation for this event will lead the faithful to make the Synod for Lebanon a positive step in their history.

5. Mr. Ambassador, I know that Lebanon wishes to see peace completely guaranteed within its borders as well as in all the surrounding region. Positive steps have been taken; but there is still a long way to go. My ardent wish is that the process under way at the present moment will lead, through dialogue between all the parties, to the reinforcement of peace and to full recognition of the right of all countries and all peoples to live in security, freedom, justice and dignity. You yourself have said that the survival of Lebanon depends on this. For my part, I can only repeat today how important I consider it, through the «rich, centuries-old tradition of collaboration between Christians and Muslims in that country»; and that Lebanon is «more than a country: it is a message of freedom and an example of pluralism for East and West» (Apostolic Letter concerning

the situation in Lebanon, 7 September 1989; L'Osservatore Romano English edition, 2 October 1989, p. I).

6. I hope, Your Excellency, that you will find true satisfaction as you carry out your mission in Rome. Be assured that my assistants will not spare any support that may be useful for your task. They will always welcome you.

I entrust to God, the Most High, my fervent wishes for your nation and I invoke an abundance of divine blessings upon you, your loved ones, your colleagues and all your fellow citizens.

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