



The Holy See

*DISCOURS DU SAINT-PÈRE JEAN-PAUL II
À S.Exc. M. GIJSBERT NICOLAAS WESTEROUEN VAN MEETEREN,
NOUVEL AMBASSADEUR DES PAYS-BAS**

Vendredi 4 octobre 1996

Mr. Ambassador,

1 I am pleased to welcome Your Excellency today for the presentation of the Letters by which Her Majesty Queen Beatrix accredits you as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of The Netherlands to the Holy See. I warmly thank you, Mr. Ambassador, for the deferential words you have just addressed to me, showing your satisfaction at being called to this new mission. I am grateful to you for the respectful message you have conveyed to me from Her Majesty the Queen of The Netherlands, and I ask you please to express to her in return my best wishes for her person, for the Royal Family, for the members of the Government and for all the Dutch people.

I am particularly aware of your Government's attention to the Holy See's positions on the great global issues and to its specific commitments, which are a contribution the Catholic Church makes to international life so as to offer our contemporaries a social situation and an environment which can foster integral human development and the harmonious growth of society.

2. You have just recalled the interest that the authorities of your nation have in the fundamental human values to which your compatriots are committed. I am very pleased with that. Justifiably, you mention the three paramount ethical categories of justice, charity and human rights. All three are based on the intrinsic value of the human person, whose dignity must be respected at every stage of his existence from conception to its natural end. This primordial dignity is also essential for the future of the whole nation which depends above all on the individuals comprising it and who are its first and most important resource. The principle of justice is at the origin of social life and human rights since it allows for the equality of citizens to be recognized and for harmony within a particular society and between nations. Thus it can be said that this principle is the primary value

of the common good. In putting this principle into practice, the lawmaker has the essential task of protecting the human being and guaranteeing his fundamental rights. On the other hand, each citizen must always bear in mind that every personal act is to be related to the common good and that it is the expression of his concern for his brothers and sisters in humanity.

3. Justice is therefore a service to the human community and one of the primary ways to serve man and to further individuals. It opens the way to peace and security. I recall that your country is host to a high international juridical authority, which currently has a role to play in the strengthening of peace between the peoples of Europe, since respect for the rules of life in common, with the authority of law, is the primary guarantee of social life. Permit me also to salute your country's efforts towards building a Europe that welcomes the nations which have recently emerged from the great trial of communism. Countries which are drafting new constitutions and setting up a new institutional system need the overall support of States having a strong democratic tradition, if they are to achieve the necessary social reforms, develop appropriate structures and give their citizens the civic education needed to take charge of the res publica. It is Europe's strength to be able to unite peoples, while legitimately respecting national sovereignty and particular cultures, through co-operation in the various spheres of common life, as well as through solidarity and charity. By its firm commitment in this direction, the European continent will lead the way to a new era of peace and brotherhood.

4. As you have stressed, charity is also an essential category for social life. It is a question of the concern each individual is called to foster towards his neighbour, an attitude of compassion and tenderness, especially towards the weakest and poorest members of society, in their own country and throughout the world. Charity recognizes everyone as a brother and partner in society united so that each individual may play his part in national life, not be excluded from economic networks and be able to benefit from the nation's wealth. I am delighted at the importance which the Dutch authorities put on development and on the struggle against situations of poverty, particularly through their contribution to humanitarian aid. You rightly mentioned the support given to this task by organizations of Christian inspiration which, using the funds they have collected, are involved in promoting individuals and local institutions according to the principle of solidarity and with a well-suited educational approach.

Catholic authorities spare no effort in this area. Continuing their tradition of charity, the faithful are involved in aiding their brothers and sisters in The Netherlands and throughout the world, in accordance with your country's missionary tradition, which you have just recalled. This is why I hope that the Catholic Church, which is aware of her responsibilities in seeking the common good with all the institutions of the Kingdom, will increasingly take her place in Dutch society and, in particular, that their social communications media will be careful to do their part to show her true face, with respect for her specific mission and approach to human and Christian values, as well as to the family, the basic cell of society. Catholics are also concerned to continue and increasingly develop their relations with all the nation's constituents; in particular, they are actively promoting

ecumenical relations with the other Christian communities, sharing the same convictions and the same desire to serve man. This dialogue is a sign of hope, for it testifies to the attention and mutual esteem among spiritual communities and provides for cultural and religious pluralism.

5. The efforts made by your country in international institutions shows your Government's commitment to peace disarmament, the peaceful resolution of conflict and solidarity between individuals and peoples across the continent and throughout the world. The future of humanity is inconceivable without a commitment to peace and justice on the part of all. We must always heed the appeal made by Pope Pius XII on the eve of the Second World War: «Nothing is lost with peace; all may be lost with war. Let men return to mutual understanding. Let them begin negotiations anew!» (Radio Message, «Un'ora grave» [24 August 1939]: MS 31 [1939], p. 334). The use of force must be avoided by every means, for it leads to grave and prolonged disorders for the populace, as we have been able to observe in the territories of the former Yugoslavia and in the Middle East. It is always a sign that dialogue has broken down. In the Catechism published in 1992 (cf. n. 2243), the Catholic Church recalls the moral conditions that may, if necessary, lead to a decision to resist the oppression of a political power and, thus, to engage in armed conflict. But it must always be remembered that the logic of arms can only encourage an escalation of violence and disfigure man and the whole human race. The international community and each country should take courageous decisions on the political and economic level to halt the arms race, which will never resolve conflicts in a lasting way and with respect for individuals and peoples. Everything in their power should be done to create and strengthen a firm friendship between nations, based on the recognition of one another's differences and on interdependence.

You know, Mr. Ambassador, that through her institutions and her members the Catholic Church has no other goal in international life than to defend man, his spiritual freedom and harmony between peoples so that human beings and communities can grow and enjoy the wealth and beauty of creation.

6 As you begin your mission, I offer you my best wishes and assure you that you will always receive attentive help and cordial understanding for my assistants.

I invoke divine blessings upon you, Your loved ones, your embassy staff, the Royal Family and all your fellow citizens.

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