



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO H.E. MR YOUM SEONG, AMBASSADOR OF KOREA
ACCREDITED TO THE HOLY SEE***

Friday, 4 July 2003

Mr Ambassador,

I am pleased to accept the Letters with which President Roh Moo-hyun accredits you as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Korea to the Apostolic See. I offer you a cordial welcome and thank you for your kind words. Also, kindly convey to the First Magistrate of the Nation you represent here, as well as to the Government Authorities, my sentiments of deep esteem and appreciation of their action for the security and well-being of all the inhabitants of Korea, as well as for the dialogue initiatives taking place with those who live in the other half of the Korean peninsula. Today's meeting takes place on the 40th anniversary of the opening of a Legation of the Republic of Korea to the Holy See. Indeed, the close links between the Catholic Church and the Korean people go back further in time, and witness to the fruitfulness of Christ's presence and the deep penetration of his message. In fact, in these chequered events, the Gospel has been able to grow and flourish on Korean soil, contributing to a greater openness among its inhabitants and giving rise to a fruitful and reciprocal exchange of the values of civilization with other countries. The great number of Koreans raised to the honours of the altar shows how deep the roots of holiness are among this people, and this gives prestige to the universal Church. Providence has allowed me to pay two visits to the country that you represent. I was able to become acquainted with the progress and the freedom and well-being achieved by a young and dynamic society. However, I also perceived the disappointment of many in observing that the peninsula, inhabited by a single people, is obliged to live in painful division. The enduring sentiments of hostility and opposition between the two nations are undeniably a cause of concern, but it is a cause of hope to know that there is a firm desire to alleviate tensions through dialogue and encounters, to smooth out the differences and find a common ground for fruitful understanding. Every encouraging sign in this direction should be sustained with patience, courage, perseverance and far-sightedness. Indeed, it is only through respectful dialogue that positive and lasting goals can be achieved. The Agreements signed testify that the sincere desire of the parties for a peaceful settlement brings concrete results with reciprocal respect and loyal behaviour, with every advantage not only to reconciliation between the two States, but also to stability in the regional context of the Korean peninsula. This political process will probably acquire greater strength

and credibility if the most developed part of the peninsula can meet, as far as it can, the impelling needs of the other area. The Holy See looks favourably on every effort at dialogue and cooperation, as well as the constant attention to the weaker classes of the population. The memory of past suffering must not undermine faith in a better future. It is necessary, on the contrary, to build the present and the future of Korea on the solid foundations of respect for the person and a constant search for justice and peace. To this end, in the present situation it is necessary to continue tirelessly to work for the gradual, balanced and verifiable elimination of weapons of mass destruction, and especially nuclear arms. "This", my Venerable Predecessor John XXIII wrote 40 years ago in his Encyclical *Pacem in Terris*, "requires that the fundamental principles upon which peace is based in today's world be replaced by an altogether different one, namely, the realization that true and lasting peace between nations cannot consist in the possession of an equal supply of armaments but only in mutual trust..., for it is a thing which not only is dictated by common sense, but is in itself most desirable and most fruitful of good" (n. 113). The Catholic community in Korea is a promising reality, and I know that it enjoys esteem and respect. It carries out its mission inspired by the Gospel and makes concrete its own religious witness in its institutions for education, social assistance and charitable aid which are appreciated by many. Faithful to Christ's commandment, the Catholic Church proclaims the Gospel of Life. She does not hide her concern at the sad phenomenon of abortion which is a terrible social scourge. Abortion, moreover, is accompanied by a widespread practice of artificial birth control and the spread of a pragmatic mindset that justifies and encourages genetic manipulation, even the most unscrupulous such as capital punishment continues to be. In the face of these serious threats to life, the Church feels that it is her duty to recall the values in which she believes, values that are a heritage of humanity since with natural law they are engraved by God in every person's heart. A programme whose priority objective is the safeguarding of life and of the family, will certainly be beneficial to the solidity and stability of Korean society. I am pleased in this regard to recall what I wrote in the Encyclical *Evangelium Vitae*: "If, as a result of a tragic obscuring of the collective conscience, an attitude of scepticism were to succeed in bringing into question even the fundamental principles of the moral law, the democratic system itself would be shaken in its foundations, and would be reduced to a mere mechanism for regulating different and opposing interests on a purely empirical basis" (n. 70). Mr Ambassador, I warmly hope that the good relations that exist between the Holy See and the country you represent will be further intensified through a profitable dialogue. I would ask you please to convey to the President of Korea, to the Government Authorities and to the dear People whom you represent here, my cordial greeting and fervent good wishes for prosperity and progress, in justice and in peace. In the fulfilment of the exalted mission entrusted to you, you will be able to count on my constant benevolence and on the competent support of my collaborators. I assure you of my prayers and invoke upon you and upon all those for whom you are spokesman abundant blessings from

Heaven.

*L'Osservatore Romano. Weekly Edition in English n.29 pp.4, 5. © Copyright 2003 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana