



## The Holy See

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**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI  
TO H.E. Mr STANISLAS LEFEBVRE DE LABOULAYE  
AMBASSADOR OF FRANCE TO THE HOLY SEE**

*Monday, 26 January 2009*

*Mr Ambassador,*

I am pleased to welcome you, Your Excellency, on this solemn occasion of the presentation of the Letters that accredit you as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the French Republic to the Holy See. First of all, I would be grateful if you would convey my greetings to His Excellency Mr Nicolas Sarkozy, President of the French Republic, and express to him my cordial wishes for him, for his work at the service of your country and also for all the French people.

My joy at having been able to go to Paris and to Lourdes to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the Apparitions of the Virgin Mary to Bernadette Soubirous last year still resonates within me. I would like to repeat my thanks to the President of the Republic for his invitation, as well as to all the political, civil and military authorities who ensured the complete success of that journey. My gratitude also goes to the Pastors and to the Catholic faithful who made those large gatherings possible. They witnessed to the capacity of the faith to tranquilly keep open the interior space that exists in man and to bring together great crowds of very diverse men and women fraternally and joyfully.

Those moments have shown, in case there were need to do so, that the Catholic community is one of the living strengths in your country. The faithful have well understood and have welcomed with interest and appreciation the words of your President, who stressed that the contribution of the great spiritual families constitute a "great wealth" for the life of the nation that it would be "foolish" to ignore. The Church is ready to respond to this invitation and is ready to work in view of the common good.

Next year in France a great debate will be held on bioethics.

I am pleased that the parliamentary mission on the questions relating to the end of life have until now offered wise conclusions, full of humanity, proposing an intensification of the efforts to provide better assistance to the sick. I hope that this same wisdom that recognizes the inviolable character of every human life will be at work during the revision of the laws on bioethics. The Pastors of the Church in France have worked tirelessly and are ready to offer a quality contribution to the public debate that will be held. Recently, the Magisterium of the Church, on her part, has wished to emphasize, through the Document *Dignitas personae* published by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, how much strong scientific progress must be guided by the concern to serve the good and the inalienable dignity of the human being.

As everywhere in the world, today your country's government must face the economic crisis. I hope that the proposed measures will especially seek to favour social cohesion, by protecting the most vulnerable populations and above all by once again providing the greatest possible number of people with the opportunity to become actors in an economy that is a true creator of services and genuine wealth. These difficulties are a painful source of worry and suffering for many, but they are also an opportunity to heal financial mechanisms, in order to help the economy to function and to progress towards a greater attention to man and to reduce the old and new forms of poverty (cf. *Address at the Elysée palace*, 12 September 2008).

The Church wishes to witness to Christ, placing herself at the service of every man. This is why I am pleased with the Accord that you yourself mentioned earlier and that has just been signed between France and the Holy See on the recognition of diplomas awarded by the Pontifical universities and Catholic institutes. Numerous French and foreign students will benefit from this Accord, which falls within the framework of the Bologna Process.

It highlights the great contribution, above all in the field of education, of the Church's concern for the formation of youth. This contribution has as its aim that they may acquire the adequate technical competence to demonstrate their capabilities later, and also receive a formation that prepares them to be vigilant in facing the ethical dimension of every responsibility.

A short time ago, the French authorities had yet again expressed their determination to set up mechanisms for discussion and for the representation of faiths. In this regard, during my Visit to France, I was able to congratulate them on their enactment of official proceedings for dialogue between the French Government and the Catholic Church. Furthermore, I am aware of the continuous concern of French Bishops to create conditions for a serene and permanent dialogue with all the religious communities and all lines of thought. I thank them for assuring in this way the foundations of an intercultural and interreligious dialogue in which the different religious communities have the opportunity to show that they are builders of peace. In fact, as I emphasized from the platform of the United Nations, by recognizing the transcendent value of every human

being far from setting men against each other religious communities favour the conversion of heart "which then leads to a commitment to resist violence, terrorism and war, and to promote justice and peace" (*Holy Father's Address*, 18 April 2008).

In this regard, you, Mr Ambassador, mentioned the many crises that mark the international scene today. It is well-known and I have had the opportunity to recall it in my recent Discourse to the Diplomatic Corps that the Holy See follows situations of conflict and cases of violations of human rights with constant concern. It does not doubt that the international community, where France has an important role, can make an ever more just and effective contribution in favour of peace and harmony among nations and of the development of every country.

I wish to welcome the occasion of our meeting to cordially greet, through you, the communities of Catholic faithful who live in France. I know that this year they will have great joy in seeing the canonization of Bl. Jeanne Jugan, Foundress of the Congregation of the Little Sisters of the Poor. Many French people are in fact indebted to the humble and steadfast witness of charity given by the religious who have followed in her footsteps at the service of poor and elderly people above all.

This event will demonstrate, once again, how much a living faith abounds with good works and to what extent holiness is a soothing balsam for humanity's wounds.

As you start your noble mission of representation to the Holy See, I wish to honour the memory of your predecessor, His Excellency Mr Bernard Kessedjian, by acknowledging the human qualities he has shown in his mission at the service of relations between France and the Holy See. I entrust him with gratitude, together with his loved ones, to the Lord's tenderness.

Mr Ambassador, I offer you my best wishes for the felicitous fulfilment of your mission. I am certain that you will always find among my collaborators the welcome and understanding that you may need. Upon you, Your Excellency, your family and your collaborators, as well as upon the entire French people and its leaders, I wholeheartedly invoke an abundance of divine Blessings.