



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER
TO THE NEW AMBASSADOR
OF THE REPUBLIC OF GEORGIA TO THE HOLY SEE***

Thursday, 6 December 2001

Mr Ambassador,

It is with great pleasure that I welcome you today and accept the Letters of Credence appointing you as the first Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Georgia to the Holy See. I thank you for the greetings which you bring from President Eduard Shevardnadze, and I ask you to convey to him, to the Government and to the people of Georgia my good wishes and the assurance of my prayers for the peace and prosperity of the nation. Your presence here today, inaugurating a new period of formal diplomatic relations between Georgia and the Holy See, is a most welcome occasion, filled with hope and promise.

I am grateful for your words of appreciation of the Holy See's efforts to build peace and bring reconciliation in the face of what you call "the emergence and growth of old and new tensions in many parts of the world". Through its activity, including its diplomatic activity, the Holy See seeks to help all peoples live a fully human life in peace and harmony, with an eye to the integral development of individuals and nations. You have spoken of Georgia's efforts aimed at "strengthening democratic principles... and securing protection for the fundamental freedoms of citizens"; and these principles and freedoms are also central to the Holy See's perspective on international issues.

The Holy See's approach is distinctive because it is not tied to national interest of any kind, but seeks instead the common good of the whole human family. It is a perspective driven not by ideology, but by a vision of the human person, and a conviction that when this vision is undermined or abandoned the very foundation of human society is shaken. It is a vision of freedom, but of freedom linked to truth – in particular, to the truth of the human person, which

alone provides a sound basis for constructive political and diplomatic activity. The history of your own nation teaches that freedom is always fragile; and the last century showed dramatically how freedom is eroded once the truth of the human person is denied.

The most destructive of the lies about the human person which the twentieth century produced were born of materialistic views of the world and the person. Communism and Fascism may have foundered, but in their wake we see at times new forms of materialism, less ideologically driven and less spectacular in their manifestations perhaps, but nonetheless destructive in their own way. They stem from a flawed vision of the human person, measured almost exclusively by concern for economic well-being. It is of course right that people should aspire to well-being, but there are other fundamental features of our humanity which must be taken into account.

During my brief but intense visit to Georgia in 1999, I saw clearly that the nation's spiritual and cultural resources, though they may have been driven underground during the years of Communist oppression, are still vibrant. Even if the process of rebuilding is more difficult and complex than was hoped or imagined a decade ago, Communism did not succeed in alienating Georgian culture completely from its religious sources. I am convinced that these are the surest guarantee of a bright future beyond the difficulties of the present time.

In speaking of the process of rebuilding the nation, let me repeat what I said in Tbilisi, that "one of the most difficult challenges of our time is the encounter between tradition and modernity. This dialogue between old and new will in great part determine the future of the younger generation, and therefore the future of the nation" (*Address to the World of Culture and Learning*, 9 November 1999). The rediscovery of Georgia's deep spiritual heritage and of your traditional humanism, developed over centuries of Christian life, will be society's greatest asset in achieving the genuine civic and cultural renewal for which so many of your citizens long.

Mr Ambassador, I am confident that the diplomatic mission which you begin today will help to strengthen the bonds of understanding and cooperation between Georgia and the Holy See. I assure you that the various offices of the Roman Curia will be ready to assist you in the fulfilment of your duties. With every good wish for your personal success and happiness, I invoke the abundant blessings of Almighty God upon you and the people of your beloved land.

**L'Osservatore Romano* 7.12.2001 p. 6.

Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II, vol. XXIV, 2 p. 1039-1041.

L'Osservatore Romano. Weekly edition in English n. 51/52 p.7

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