



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO H.E. Mr SIEOU-JE HOANG NEW AMBASSADOR
OF THE REPUBLIC OF CHINA TO THE HOLY SEE***

Monday, 17 June 1991

Mr Ambassador,

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you to the Vatican and to accept the Letters of Credence which appoint you as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of China to the Holy See. I thank you for the greetings which you have conveyed from your President, your Government and fellow-citizens. I would ask you to assure them all of the sincerity of my good wishes and the earnestness of my prayers for their peace and well-being.

You have spoken of the noble ideals and aspirations which lie at the heart of the great Chinese cultural tradition. The achievements of mind and spirit epitomized in the teachings of renowned Chinese philosophers and sages gave substance and form to a humanism which survived the vicissitudes of history and imbued the cultural and social life of the whole Chinese family with ennobling truths and values. When Catholicism was introduced into China, it was at the level of that cultural and moral heritage that a very profound and fruitful exchange took place. It was a dialogue which arose spontaneously out of man's innate tendency to transcend himself and his material circumstances. It was a fine example of that universal human experience which I enunciated thus in my recent Encyclical regarding the Church's social teaching: "Man remains above all a being who seeks the truth and strives to live in that truth, deepening his understanding of it through a dialogue which involves past and future generations" (John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, 49).

The meeting between your people's culture and the Gospel blossomed in spite of not a few difficulties. It revealed a wide spectrum of mutual understanding and shared aspirations. As I wrote to the Church in Taiwan on the occasion of the Symposium on Evangelization which took place in

March 1988: "To accept Christ and his Gospel in no way means to abandon one's own culture or to be less loyal in regard to one's own nation" (John Paul II, *Address to the Bishops and Members of the Regional Episcopal Conference of China*, 2 Feb. 1988).

The Church is deeply committed to this dialogue between her faith and the rich traditions of your culture. She seeks to understand ever more fully your people's genuine way of thinking and feeling, so that her worship of God and her service to the human family, especially to the poor and needy, will effectively contribute to building a deeply just and peaceful society.

Today, especially in developed societies, there is a danger that the historic memory of peoples, which preserves their common identity, will be weakened. People are distracted and often unaware of the negative consequences of the loss of spiritual values which characterizes life where an exaggerated consumerism sets the tone of social conduct. Society becomes less "personalized" because the family and other intermediate groups are no longer able to fulfill their natural function to provide the full support, formation and solidarity which their members require (Cf. John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, 49). The Church, in each local community of believers as well as at the level of her presence in the international community, seeks to offset these trends by promoting a sense of the value of every human being, made in God's image, and by educating individuals to an awareness of their responsibilities and of their duty to develop their human potential. In relation to society, the Church's sole purpose is *care and responsibility* for man, who has been entrusted to her by Christ himself (Cf. John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, 53).

The Church is immensely confident that in spite of deviations along the way man's central place within society will be more and more recognized, and that State authorities and political bodies will more and more realize that it is imperative to create the conditions of freedom which will enable man to attend to his spiritual and transcendent needs. Respect for freedom of thought, conscience and religion is essential for human development and for the social harmony of nations. A proper application of the principle of religious freedom helps to educate citizens to recognize the demands of the moral order, and consequently to act responsibly in fulfilling their obligations, in responding to the needs of others, and in cooperating with their fellow-citizens in building structures of development, justice and peace.

Mr. Ambassador, your diplomatic mission to the Holy See has less to do with the politics of relations between States than it has to do with reflection and action in relation to the ethical and moral principles which ought to guide the participation of peoples in international life and the efforts of their respective Governments to respond to the great questions facing the human family. In the international forum the Holy See offers its willing and loyal cooperation, taking to heart the problems, anxieties and aspirations of the world's peoples, with full respect for their sovereignty and the specific forms of life and government which they freely and legitimately give themselves.

With my prayers for the success of your mission, I assure Your Excellency of the assistance and

cooperation of the various departments of the Holy See. I gladly invoke abundant divine blessings upon you and your fellow-citizens.

*AAS 84 (1992), p. 304-306.

Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II, vol. XIV, 1 pp. 1691-1693.

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