



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II TO KING CARL XVI AND QUEEN SILVIA OF SWEDEN*

Friday, 3 May 1991

Your Majesties,

1. Gud välsigna Sverige!

With this prayerful wish I welcome Your Majesties to the Vatican and assure you of the particular joy which this visit brings me. It was with this prayer on my lips that I set foot on Swedish soil on 8 June 1989. Our meeting here today brings back vivid memories of that moment and, for my part, it is an occasion filled with sentiments of esteem and friendship for the beloved Swedish people.

The cordial relationship between your country and the Holy See is a source of great satisfaction. I gladly recall that diplomatic relations between Sweden and the Holy See were re-established in 1982, during my own Pontificate, thus resuming traditional contacts of this kind which date back to the sixteenth century. However, in a broader sense, *ties between Sweden and the Holy See go back over a thousand years*, to the presence of the first missionaries, led in particular by Saint Ansgar. The flourishing of the Christian faith was intimately linked with the development of the sense of nationhood. The memory of those contacts, though, is especially connected with the person and work of *the great Swedish woman Saint Birgitta, who lived and died in this City*. It was she who, together with Saint Catherine of Siena, was instrumental in convincing the Popes to return from Avignon to their own See, close to the tomb of Saint Peter. Her memory lives on in this City in her spiritual daughters, the members of the Order of the Most Holy Saviour and Saint Birgitta, in the home where she lived and died, which became the Hospice "of the Goths", a place of welcome for the many pilgrims who came here from your land and which many Swedish pilgrims still visit.

2. As Your Majesties are aware, preparations are well under way for this year's special celebration

to mark *the Sixth Centenary of the canonization of Saint Birgitta*. I am looking forward to taking part in a solemn ecumenical encounter in Saint Peter's Basilica next October, with the attendance of the Lutheran Archbishop of Uppsala, Bertil Werkström who is here today, and of Archbishop John Vikström, Primate of the Lutheran Church in Finland, as well as of Catholic Bishops from Scandinavia. Birgitta, who was canonized by my predecessor Boniface IX in 1391, represents a common legacy of both Churches. Her mortal remains at Vadstena and her relics here in Rome are signs of a spiritual bridge as it were, a bond of grace between this See and Sweden.

In her day Saint Birgitta fought for the spiritual renewal of the Church. Her love for the Church can inspire us today in our search to obey the Lord's will and to restore the bonds of unity in faith among divided Christians. On the anniversary of her canonization our common prayer will be for the well-being of the nation and for further progress in the already cordial relationship between the Catholic Church and the Swedish Lutheran Church.

3. My visit to your country enabled me to experience at first hand Sweden's rich historical, artistic and cultural heritage. In Stockholm, Uppsala, Vadstena and Linköping I was reminded that for over a thousand years the Christian faith has been a deep and fruitful source of the nation's life and achievements. The names of Saints Ansgar, Erik and Birgitta, to mention only these, stand out boldly not only in the history of your own country but in the history of the whole of Europe. Today, that *patrimony of Christian thought*, life and service constitutes a solid basis for your society's unity and harmony, and for a spiritual renewal which will benefit all its members.

Europe and the world are in the process of adapting to a new economic and political situation. We must hope that our societies will also experience a renewal of cultural life, capable of producing a genuine uplifting of the human spirit. Above all, we must hope that the younger generations will rediscover the perennial truth contained in their Christian heritage, and that from this they will derive *a consistent ethical and moral vision fully capable of defending the inviolability of the human person*, with a special sense of responsibility towards the weakest members of society. This is the prayer I offer for Sweden, conscious as I am of the enormous contribution which she can continue to make to the cause of human development and the promotion of a civilization fully respectful of human rights.

4. During the course of my meeting two years ago with the Swedish University community at Uppsala, I reflected on *the link between the Christian heritage of Europe and the fundamental values of our contemporary civilization*. Among these values I mentioned "the dignity of the person, the sacred character of life, the central role of the family, the importance of education, the freedom to think, to speak and to profess one's own convictions or religion, the legal protection of individuals and groups, the cooperation of all for the common good, the concept of work as a sharing in the Creator's own work, the authority of the State, itself governed by law and reason" (Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Upsalae, allocutio ad academicas Auctoritates, docentes alumnosque perinsignis Universitatis*, 4, die 9 iun. 1989: *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, XII, 1 [1989] 1611).

Today, the importance of these values is not always clearly perceived, but there is no doubt that they have been the inspiration behind Sweden's well-known commitment to the goals of social justice and respect for human rights everywhere, of international cooperation, disarmament and peace, of effective solidarity with the needs of less fortunate peoples. May your fellow countrymen continue to demonstrate such solidarity *in willing acceptance of refugees and immigrants, and in your generous assistance to many Third World countries*. In fulfilling her spiritual mission, the Catholic Church in Sweden is happy to be able to cooperate in this worthy humanitarian activity.

In the Encyclical "[Centesimus Annus](#)" which I have just published. to commemorate the hundredth anniversary of the famous Encyclical on social problems, "[Rerum Novarum](#)", I have made an appeal to the developed countries not to slacken their efforts to sustain and assist the countries of the Third World. Such an appeal seems necessary in the light of the new situation which has arisen in Central and Eastern Europe. The consequent urgent need for economic and technological assistance in these countries may lead to a neglect of even more serious and long-standing conditions of poverty and want in other parts of the world. Your country's openness to all of these needs speaks highly of your people's sense of universal brotherhood. The Holy See appreciates Sweden's commitment in this area which is of great importance to the cause of peace among the peoples of the world.

5. In concluding, I thank Your Majesties for this visit. *In you I greet and pay tribute to the whole Swedish people*. I renew my sentiments of esteem and appreciation for their efforts to build a more just and caring society for themselves and their children. I pray that in doing so they will be sustained by a culture which enables the individual to exercise his creativity, intelligence, and knowledge of the world and of people; to display his capacity for self-control, personal sacrifice, solidarity and readiness to promote the common good; a culture which expresses and upholds a true and lofty idea of the person as created in the image and likeness of God, and redeemed through his grace (Cfr. *ibid.* 52).

I gladly invoke abundant divine blessings upon Your Majesties and your children. May Almighty God protect and guide your beloved people and help them to achieve their highest and noblest aspirations. *Gud välsigna Sverige!*

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