



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II TO H.E. Mr KIZHAKKE PISHARATH BALAKRISHANAN

NEW AMBASSADOR OF INDIA TO THE HOLY SEE**Saturday, 19 November 1994* Mr. Ambassador, It is a pleasure for me to accept the Letters of Credence by which you are appointed Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of India to the Holy See. I likewise gladly receive the good wishes which you bring from His Excellency the President and from the Government and people of India. To think of India is to recall that your land has been a cradle of civilization, the birthplace of a wisdom which exercises a profound influence far beyond its borders. It is therefore with esteem also for that great tradition that I welcome you to the Vatican. As Your Excellency has pointed out, India and the Holy See share common values and objectives; perhaps chief among these is concern for peace, understanding and cooperation among the nations of the world, so that people everywhere may be able to pursue their full human and spiritual development. Diplomacy has a fundamental role to play in building and maintaining just and peaceful relations between peoples and nations. By promoting mutual understanding and dialogue, barriers of distrust, suspicion and fear can be broken down, and respect for the dignity of the human person - of every person, independently of ethnic, social or religious origin - can be universally recognized as the basis of every relationship. This cause is not an easy one to serve, as witnessed to by the many points of tension and conflict still existing in the modern world. There are tragic instances, even in India itself, where ethnic, political and religious groups do not acknowledge in one another the dignity and rights which are basic to peaceful co-existence. In such situations, conflict, violence and social unrest sow division between individuals and peoples, reaping countless innocent victims. Mr. Ambassador, as you are already well aware, your mission to the Holy See is not to a power in the temporal or worldly order. Rather, the Holy See's concerns are focused on the essential values which give meaning to man's efforts to build a society in which he can fulfil his human and spiritual destiny. And, as I said during my visit to India in 1986, the renewal of the world in all its social relationships, the establishment of true peace and justice, begins in the heart of every individual and is an eminently spiritual undertaking (cf. John Paul II, *Address to the Representatives of the Different Religious and Cultural Traditions in the "Indira Gandhi" Stadium*, 5, [2 Feb. 1986]). Your presence here today attests to the resolve of the Indian Government and people to pursue this vital undertaking. It is precisely in taking on this task that individuals, peoples and nations must call upon their own special gifts and patrimonies. For India, this means taking advantage of the rich cultural and spiritual traditions which have been preserved throughout your country's history of thousands of years. By virtue of these traditions, continuity and unity have been maintained in the midst of great diversity. At the basis of that unity stands a vision of the spiritual nature of man, expressed and deepened in the works of sages, mystics, artists, philosophers and statesmen of excellence who have made significant contributions to humanity. This is the patrimony which belongs to India and which can guide and inform India's contribution to the world community. In this regard, I note with satisfaction that the Indian Constitution, in its recognition of religious freedom, enshrines respect for the dignity of the human person in its most sacred dimension.

Conscience and religious belief touch upon the innermost recesses of personality, and thus respect for religious freedom and freedom of conscience constitute the cornerstone of all freedoms. India has been renowned for its respect for the different traditions followed by its peoples. We must all hope that this respect will survive and grow, so that India may continue to represent a convincing voice raised in favour of harmony and peace in the international community. Your Excellency has commented on the almost two-thousand year presence of the Christian community in India and noted the many contributions made by its members in various fields of service to the people. The Church in fact seeks to follow the teaching and example of her Divine Founder, who - in the words of Scripture - came to serve and not to be served (cf. Mt. 20:28). Accordingly, the Church wishes to place herself wholly at the service of the dignity of the human person, and seeks to co-operate with others, especially the public authorities, in upholding the values which constitute and enhance that unique dignity. Mr Ambassador, I wish you every happiness and success in your mission as your country's Representative to the Holy See, and I assure you of the co-operation of the various offices of the Roman Curia. I would ask you kindly to convey my greetings and good wishes to the President and Government of India. May Almighty God bless you and all your fellow

citizens.

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