



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE NEW AMBASSADOR OF ICELAND
TO THE HOLY SEE****

Friday, 17 May 2002

Mr Ambassador,

With great pleasure I welcome you to the Vatican for the formal acceptance of the Letters of Credence appointing you Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Iceland to the Holy See. With enduring memories of Iceland's hospitality to me in 1989, I ask you to convey my cordial greetings to President Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson, the Government and your fellow citizens. I assure everyone of my prayers for the well-being and prosperity of the nation

The 25th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Iceland and the Holy See is a source of great satisfaction, and I rejoice with you at the many spiritual and cultural factors to which you have referred and which contribute to making ties between Iceland and the Holy See so friendly and mutually respectful. This occasion prompts me to reflect upon the context and purpose of diplomacy, especially in what you have called these "uncertain and complex times".

The shifting configuration of the international community in a globalizing world has a striking effect upon relations between countries and peoples. Perhaps it is not so much that the essential elements of the international community are changing. National governments, business and financial networks, international agencies and non-governmental organizations, Churches and civil associations of all kinds: these are the elements of society now as they have been for some time and will be in the foreseeable future. To these there should be added as an overarching and ever more influential factor the communications media – often with powerful political and commercial links – which are themselves passing through a time of rapid transition as a result of continuing technological advances. But the wider and more important point is that, if these elements are

themselves more or less stable, their interaction and relationships are not: indeed they are changing very quickly under the pressures of globalization.

One of the chief effects of this is that we see in the world shifting sources of power, as political authority is dispersed in new ways. It is clear, for instance, that business and financial leaders now exercise some of the authority which once belonged exclusively to political leaders. The effects of globalization on both the nature and practice of democracy therefore need to be further examined. Questions arise which have become all the more pressing in the light of recent events: What possibility is there of global, not just national, policies? Who would be responsible for making and implementing such policies? What possibility is there of some genuine democratic oversight of the forces increasingly at work in the international forum? What of international tribunals? Who is to appoint the judges and decide the legal framework within which such tribunals will operate? Clearly these and similar questions demand attention.

Neither individuals nor nations can escape the effects of these changes in the international arena. Because of changes in the relationship between business and government, for instance, foreign relations and trade often merge. This is perhaps inevitable, but it brings the risk of reducing the exchanges between states and peoples to commercial transactions, so that all becomes subsumed into the economy, as is happening in societies in which a consumerist ideology holds sway. If this trend is not accompanied and enriched by other social and cultural concerns, diplomacy too will fail to serve the integral development of individuals and peoples and the common good of the entire human family, as it is intended to do. In order to be faithful to its proper vocation in a time of change such as this, diplomacy needs to make the human person the centre of its vision and the criterion of its engagement; it needs to be guided by a sound understanding of the human person and of human society.

The Catholic Church too is closely involved in the life of the international community, not in order to pursue national or ideological interests, but in order to serve the integral development of peoples as the Gospel commands. Iceland has Christian roots reaching back at least to the Middle Ages, and this spiritual heritage, this Christian soul, is the deepest source of your people's character and traditions. It is also the resource from which your nation must draw as it plays its part in building the Europe of tomorrow. The Catholic community of Iceland, though small in number, eagerly contributes to this task, especially in the framework of the fruitful ecumenical relations of more recent times.

Mr Ambassador, I am confident that your mission will help to consolidate still further the cordial relations which have developed between Iceland and the Holy See in these last twenty-five years. As you assume your responsibilities within the diplomatic community accredited to the Holy See, I offer you my prayerful good wishes and assure you that the various offices of the Roman Curia will always be ready to assist you in the fulfilment of your duties. Upon you and your family, and upon the dear people of Iceland, I invoke the abundant blessings of Almighty God.

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