



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO H.E. MR. CHOU-SENG TOU
NEW AMBASSADOR OF THE REPUBLIC OF CHINA
ACCREDITED TO THE HOLY SEE***

Friday, 30 January 2004

Mr. Ambassador, It is a pleasure for me today to welcome you to the Vatican and to accept the Letters of Credence by which you are appointed Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of China to the Holy See. I wish to express my gratitude for the message of greeting which you bring from President Chen Shui-bian. I ask you to convey my own good wishes and the assurance of my prayers for prosperity and harmony in Taiwan. Mr. Ambassador, I am grateful for your words of appreciation of the Holy See's efforts to promote peace throughout the world. The Holy See views this task as part of its service to the human family, motivated by a deep concern for the well-being of every person. Cooperation among peoples, nations and governments is an essential condition to ensure a better future for all. The international community faces many challenges in this regard, among them the serious problems of world poverty, the denial of the rights of peoples and the lack of firm resolve on the part of some groups to foster peace and stability. The religious and cultural traditions of the Republic of China bear witness to the fact that human development should not be limited to economic or material success. Many of the ascetical and mystical elements of Asian religions teach that it is not the acquirement of material wealth which defines the progress of individuals and societies, but rather a civilization's ability to foster the interior dimension and transcendent vocation of men and women. Indeed, "when individuals and communities do not see a rigorous respect for the moral, cultural and spiritual requirements, based on the dignity of the person and on the proper identity of each community, beginning with the family and religious societies, then all the rest – availability of goods, abundance of technical resources applied to daily life, a certain level of material well-being – will prove unsatisfying and in the end contemptible" (Encyclical Letter *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, No. 33). For this reason it is important that all societies strive to give their citizens the necessary freedom to realize fully their true vocation. In order for this to be achieved, a country must have a steadfast commitment to promoting freedom, which is naturally derived from an uncompromising sense of the dignity of the human person. This resolution to advance freedom in human society requires first and foremost the free exercise of religion in society. (Cf. Declaration on Religious Freedom *Dignitatis Humanae*, No. 1). The good of society entails that the right to religious freedom be enshrined in law and be given effective protection. The Republic of China has shown its respect for the various religious traditions found therein and recognizes the right of all to practise their religion. Religions are a component in the life and culture of a nation and bring a great sense of well-being to a community by offering a certain level of social order, tranquillity, harmony and assistance to the

weak and the outcast. By concentrating on the most profound human questions, religions make a great contribution to the genuine progress of society and promote, in a very significant way, the culture of peace on both the national and international levels. As I said in my [World Day of Peace Message of 1992](#), "The longing for peace is deeply rooted in human nature and is found in the different religions" (No. 2). The new millennium challenges us to strive towards fulfilling a precise duty incumbent on everyone, namely greater cooperation in order to foster the values of generosity, reconciliation, justice, peace, courage and patience, which the universal human family needs today more than ever (*ibid.*). As part of this human family, the Catholic Church in the Republic of China has made a significant contribution to your Nation's social and cultural development, especially by its dedication to education, health care and assistance to the less fortunate. Through these and other activities, the Church continues to help foster the peace and unity of all peoples. In this way she pursues her spiritual and humanitarian mission, and contributes to building a society of justice, trust and cooperation. Also governments, at all times should strive to maintain contact with the marginalized of their own countries as well as with the poor and outcast of the world at large. In fact, all men and women of good will must take account of the plight of the poor and, within their means, do what they can to alleviate poverty and want. Asia is "a continent of plentiful resources and great civilizations, but where some of the poorest nations on earth are to be found, and where more than half the population suffers deprivation, poverty and exploitation" (Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation [Ecclesia in Asia](#), No. 34). In this regard, I appreciate the Republic of China's many works of charity in the international arena and most especially in the developing world. It is my hope that the people of Taiwan will continue to promote charitable activities and thus contribute to the building of an enduring peace in the world. Mr. Ambassador, I am certain that your work as a promoter of peace will manifest itself in our shared commitment to foster mutual respect, charity and freedom for all peoples. I also wish to assure you of my continued prayers that the people of the Republic of China will contribute to building a world of unity and peace. As you begin your mission, I offer you wholehearted good wishes, and I assure you of the readiness of the offices of the Roman Curia to assist you. Upon yourself and the people of the Republic of China I invoke abundant divine

blessings.

* *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, vol. XXVII, 1, p. 130-132.

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