



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF PAUL VI
TO THE NEW AMBASSADOR OF THE ARAB REPUBLIC OF SYRIA
TO THE HOLY SEE***

Thursday, 27 November 1969

Mr. Ambassador,

It is a joy for Us to welcome you and to accept from your hands the Letters by which the Chief of State of the Syrian Arab Republic, Doctor Nureddin El-Atassi accredits Your Excellency as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary to the Holy See.

In welcoming you to this residence, We feel, at the outset, the need to express Our esteem and Our affection for Syria and her people which recalls to Our mind memories dear to all Christianity. Is it not on your soil that several of the first Christian communities developed? Is it not near Damascus that the apostle St. Paul had the grace to receive the light of Christ, an event now so happily recalled by the restoration of the Memorial of St Paul? This presence of the Catholic Church is attested today by the vitality of the various Christian communities with their distinct traditional rites.

Moreover, in the appointment of Your Excellency, We wish to see especially the desire of the Syrian Government – as you yourself were saying a moment ago – to strengthen still further its relations of friendship with the Holy See. We stress this all the more gladly since, as far as the Holy See is concerned, it has always hoped for such a rapprochement. Thanks to the ever greater openness which will result from this, as We hope it will, the vital problems which present themselves to the Christians of Syria and, in the first place, those at the level of the education of youth, will especially be able to be studied and resolved in the common interest.

Indeed, We gladly re-affirm on this solemn occasion: no one has anything to fear from the education given in Catholic schools. Drawing its strength from the fundamental spiritual values,

open to the needs of the modern world, formative of liberty and of the sense of justice, this education aims to promote the full development of man, of the whole man, in conformity with his eminent dignity. At the same time, it wants to prepare him to integrate himself in civil society, to become a collaborator of social progress, always respectful of the authority of his country and loyal towards his fatherland.

The sorrowful events in the Middle-East find in Us – is it necessary to stress it? – a profound echo. With anxiety We express the most ardent wishes that justice and the right of people may find at last their concrete and satisfactory expressions for all.

And if it does not pertain to Us indeed to solve directly questions which depend upon the competence of the States concerned and of the Organization of the United Nations, We have let no occasion pass to bring to it Our specific contribution, and to encourage the peaceful solution of the discords which have arisen and have developed in a dangerous way. We remain always disposed – is it necessary to repeat it? – to respond to every new appeal which would appear reasonable to Us. Wherever it was impossible for Us to exercise direct action, for example, in assistance to the refugees of Palestine, We did Our best, and We shall continue to give them evidence, especially the young, of Our affection and Our understanding of their distressing situation.

In expressing, through your intermediacy, Our respectful greetings to the Chief of State of the Syrian Arab Republic, We express, to Your Excellency, Our best wishes for the accomplishment of your noble mission.

It is with these sentiments that We invoke upon your person and all those who are dear to you the blessings of the all-powerful God, the Father of all peoples.

*ORa n.50 p.2.