



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS
POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO H.E. Mr THEOPHILOS V. THEOPHILOU
AMBASSADOR OF THE REPUBLIC OF CYPRUS
TO THE HOLY SEE***

24 April 1997

Mr Ambassador,

On this happy occasion I extend to you a cordial welcome and accept the Letters accrediting you as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Cyprus to the Holy See. With heartfelt gratitude for the greetings which you have brought from your Government and people, I ask you kindly to convey to His Excellency President Glafcos Clerides the assurance of my goodwill and of my prayers.

Your presence today at the Vatican as the Representative of a people proud of their ancient civilization and cultural values serves to remind us that peoples and cultures flourish when the spiritual dimension of the person is given due place in the life of society. Regard for human dignity and rights accompanies the transcendent view of man's destiny which, from the earliest Christian times, has been deeply enshrined in the minds and hearts of Cypriots. In effect, acknowledgment of man's unique dignity as made in the image of the Creator (cf. Gen 1:26-27) provides the solid foundation for building a society based on freedom, justice and peace. In this sense, authentic material and moral progress depend upon the observance of "universal human rights, rooted in the nature of the person, rights which reflect the objective and inviolable demands of a universal moral law" (*Address to the General Assembly of the United Nations Organization*, 5 October 1995, No. 3).

Peace, which has been called "the tranquillity of order" (Saint Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, XIX, 13), is not a passive state, but an achievement of the conscious and painstaking efforts of those who,

with God's help, strive to create it. It is not enough — though it is an indispensable first step — to limit wars, halt hostilities and guarantee security. It is also necessary to support concrete initiatives that will lead to a reconciliation of hearts. The enormous challenge of working for reconciliation can be met only if parties in conflict are determined to free themselves of past conditioning. As the Third Christian Millennium approaches, I have asked for a re-examination of history with a new attitude of openness and a desire for a "healing of memories" (cf. *Message for the World Day of Peace*, 1 Jan. 1997, No. 3). If the new Millennium is to dawn in peace, people and nations must be persuaded of the need to offer and accept forgiveness — "the essential condition for making the journey towards an authentic and lasting peace" (*ibid.*, No. 1).

Mr Ambassador, the continuing division of Cyprus reminds us that a solution has yet to be found to this painful problem. I repeat in this regard what I said in 1996 to the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See: "Such a situation, which prevents people who are separated or dispossessed of their property from building their future, cannot be maintained indefinitely. May the negotiations between the parties involved be intensified and inspired by a sincere desire to bring them to a successful conclusion!" (*Address*, 13 January 1996, No. 4). We must be convinced that if mutual respect, good will, a willingness to admit past mistakes and a firm commitment to peace prevail, a way forward will be found. The courageous efforts of far-sighted leaders can lead to just solutions even in the case of longstanding conflicts and divisions.

The Catholic faithful of Cyprus are eager to cooperate with their Orthodox brothers and sisters in offering the testimony of lives inspired by the values of their Christian faith. As Catholics and Orthodox prepare to celebrate the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, may they pray together that the Holy Spirit will guide them to more effective cooperation in the service of the Gospel of Peace. Moreover, in the spirit of the Beatitudes they should seek to create a climate of interreligious dialogue with the followers of other religions, in order to open the way for all the people of Cyprus to overcome the wounds of division and engage in practical gestures of reconciliation.

On this solemn occasion, Mr Ambassador, I offer you my best wishes for the noble task that you are about to undertake, certain that you will do all you can to strengthen the bonds of friendship between the Holy See and the Republic of Cyprus. Rest assured that in the fulfilment of your mission you will always find a cordial welcome at the various offices of the Roman Curia. Upon Your Excellency and your fellow-citizens I cordially invoke the blessings of Almighty God.

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