



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER
TO THE NEW AMBASSADOR
OF MONGOLIA
TO THE HOLY SEE***

Friday, 18 May 2001

Mr Ambassador,

1. I am pleased to accept the letters with which President Natsagjin Bagabandi accredits you as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Mongolia to the Holy See. I would like to express my deep gratitude for your kind words at the beginning of your mission, describing the lofty principles by which you intend to be inspired in its fulfilment.

Next, as I thank you for the cordial sentiments which the Head of State has once again wished to express to me, I ask you to convey to him, as well as to the government authorities of Mongolia, the high esteem and constant concern with which I follow the progress of the noble people you represent. I cherish a vivid memory of the visit that the President of Mongolia paid to me on 5 June last year in order to strengthen the relations of reciprocal respect and mutual dialogue that exist between the Apostolic See and the Mongolian people. I hope very much that they will continue and be intensified, and will contribute to building a more just and supportive world.

You rightly mentioned the long tradition of tolerance and dialogue which are a feature of the people of Mongolia who have now definitively entered the world scene with their own full sovereignty.

2. The 800th anniversary of the foundation of the Mongolian State will be celebrated in 2006. This is certainly an important event which provides an opportunity to review the long journey through history to our time. It is also the occasion to recall the age-old connections which mark relations between Mongolia and the Holy See. These relations go far back in time. In fact, already, in March

1245 my predecessor Innocent IV had already sent a diplomatic mission to the camp of Khan Batu, which later reached the camp of Güyük, "the great king and the people of the Tartars", at the Sira Ordu of the capital Karakorum. We have been left the praiseworthy *Historia Mongolorum quos nos Tartaros appellamus* of Friar John of Plano Carpini's unforgettable mission. The chronicles of the missions of Khan Argun to Honorius IV and Nicholas IV have also been kept intact. It can be said that despite the inevitable difficulties, this respectful dialogue has never been interrupted, just as the farsighted attention between Mongolia and the Apostolic See has never been lacking.

In this regard, I would like to recall the cordiality with which my predecessor, the venerable Pontiff Nicholas IV, treated Prince Kharbenda, exhorting him not to abandon the sound traditions of his people after becoming Christian. "We advise you with affection", he wrote in 1291, "not to make any changes in the habits, dress or traditional food of your country, so that no reason for dissent or scandal will arise against you" (*BF IV*, 530). In addition to respect for these popular traditions, the Pope recommended that they not abandon the legitimate cultural patrimony.

Fruitful contacts between the Mongolian people and the Church of Rome also continued later. This is attested, among other things, by the words that the Great Khan Gasan wrote to Pope Boniface VIII and by the Mission of John of Montecorvino and Odoric of Pordenone.

3. In Mongolia, the presence of flourishing Christian communities over a long period has been recorded. At their arrival the evangelizers were pleasantly surprised to note the people's great tolerance of the disciples of Christ. The spirit of dialogue established between Christianity and the majority religion of the Mongolian State encouraged contacts and respectful, rewarding exchanges. Unfortunately, subsequent historical events gradually led to a mutual estrangement.

However the Church, then as now, "has a high regard for the manner of life and conduct, the precepts and doctrines which, although differing in many ways from her own teaching, nevertheless often reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens all men". She "therefore urges her sons to enter with prudence and charity into discussion and collaboration with members of other religions. Let Christians, while witnessing to their own faith and way of life, acknowledge, preserve and encourage the spiritual and moral truths found among non-Christians, also their social life and culture" (*Nostra aetate*, n. 2).

It is now nine years since the Catholic Church resumed her work among the beloved people of the country you are representing here. She is motivated by the desire to serve loyally the people of Mongolia loyally, working in the field of education and social development. Christians will not fail to support programmes that can further enrich their patrimony of knowledge and, especially, the integration of Mongolia's younger generations into the modern world, which is marked by so many rapid social changes, while at the same time helping them to preserve their own specific cultural identity.

The Holy See then, is closer than ever to your country and to the sufferings of your people that are due to the recent natural disasters. It likewise supports the efforts your Government is making to build up an ever more fruitful dialogue with other peoples. The Apostolic See has done and will continue to do its utmost to ensure that international community show solidarity with the Mongolian people and generously support it.

4. Mr Ambassador, while you are preparing to take on the grand task entrusted to you, I would like to assure you of my welcome and of every appropriate help for the successful outcome of your lofty mission to this Holy See.

Please convey my spiritual closeness together with my fervent good wishes for prosperity and progress in peace and in justice to the President of Mongolia, to the authorities of the government and to the beloved people you represent here. I substantiate my cordial sentiments with prayer to God that blessings from Heaven may be poured out in abundance upon you and upon those you represent.

**L'Osservatore Romano. Weekly edition in English n.23 p.8.*

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