



# The Holy See

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***ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER  
TO THE NEW AMBASSADOR  
OF NORWAY TO THE HOLY SEE\****

*Friday, 13 December 2002*

*Your Excellency,*

I am pleased to welcome you to the Vatican as you present the Letters of Credence by which His Majesty King Harald V has appointed you Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Norway to the Holy See. I recall with joy the recent visit of Their Majesties King Harald and Queen Sonja, and I ask you to convey my gratitude to His Majesty for his kind greetings and assure him of my prayers for the Royal Family and for all the people of Norway.

As Your Excellency has mentioned, Christianity has for more than one thousand years played a vital role in shaping the values of Norwegian society. Indeed, throughout the continent of Europe the truths and values of Christianity have long been the foundation of the very fabric of society, giving form to its institutions and sustaining its peoples in their march through time, in that never-ending human quest for truth, justice and freedom. However, one cannot help but notice that today a certain eclipse of the sense of God has resulted in an eclipse of the sense of the transcendence of man and of the intrinsic dignity of human life. Caught within the narrow confines of a materialistic outlook on reality, which easily leads to absorption with self and a utilitarian approach to living, people sometimes fail to recognize the nature of life as a gift, a gift which finds its genuine meaning and purpose in openness to the truth of its origin in God and in the exercise of wholehearted solidarity with other human beings. Limited by a self-centred understanding of themselves, people find it hard to accept the reality of a higher and objective law written on their hearts and accessible to conscience, that inner sanctuary of the soul where each one is challenged to reach the full measure of human maturity.

Christianity must continue to exercise the role it has always had in Europe, as the “soul” of its peoples, shedding light on and encouraging not only their religious but also their cultural and social development. Since the beginning of my Pontificate I have insisted on the importance which the Church attaches to the cultural life of peoples and nations, for a community’s culture is the response it gives to the fundamental questions of life, a response which is a crucial part of social

attitudes and behaviour. I repeat what I said on my arrival in Oslo on 1 June 1989: "To remember the events and influences which have shaped a nation is to understand better the sources of its present historical direction". That is why I have encouraged Christians to apply their faith, in a spirit of ecumenical and interreligious cooperation, to the shaping of their own communities and of the wider international community.

The challenges are considerable. A society faithful to its Christian roots cannot but be a society intensely concerned to meet the needs of others in less fortunate circumstances. It is a society which feels a deep-seated responsibility in the face of the prospect of an ecological crisis or the problems of peace or the lack of guarantees for the fundamental human rights of people. That is why I express once more my personal appreciation of Norway's active solidarity with developing nations in far-flung parts of the world. I am confident that the aid which you generously give will always aim at serving the genuine interests of the peoples involved. In particular I have followed closely the efforts led by Norway to bring peace to the troubled Island of Sri Lanka, and I am glad to note the progress made in that difficult negotiation.

The exercise of solidarity within each society is the expression of a firm and persevering determination to promote the common good. In your own country such solidarity has a special place in the treatment given to the growing immigrant communities. Openness, respect and a sincere readiness for dialogue make it possible for immigrants, while they struggle to meet their own needs and those of their families, to make a specific and positive contribution to the country that receives them.

The Catholic Church in Norway, prompted by the belief that in the Church no one is a stranger, has found its experience of welcoming migrant peoples enriching and fruitful. Parish communities in many instances have become training grounds of hospitality and places where people can grow in knowledge and respect for one another as brothers and sisters in God's family.

Your Excellency, I am confident that your presence as your country's diplomatic representative will serve to strengthen further the bonds of friendship and cooperation between Norway and the Holy See. As you begin your mission I assure you that the various offices of the Roman Curia will be ready to assist you in every way possible in the fulfilment of your duties. Upon you and upon your fellow citizens I cordially invoke the abundant blessings of Almighty God.

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\**Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, vol. XXVI/2 p.886-888.

*L'Osservatore Romano* 14.12.2002 p.7.

*L'Osservatore Romano. Weekly Edition in English* n.51/52 p.10.

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