



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO H.E. MR LARS PETTER FORBERG
AMBASSADOR OF THE KINGDOM OF NORWAY TO THE HOLY SEE***

Thursday, 16 December 2004

Your Excellency,

I am pleased to welcome you today and to accept the Letters of Credence by which you are appointed Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Kingdom of Norway to the Holy See. Though my visit to your country took place some years ago, I fondly recall the warmth and hospitality with which I was received. I thank you for the gracious greetings which you bring from His Majesty King Harald V and from Prime Minister Bondevik. I would ask you to convey to the Royal Family, the Government and all the people of Norway my good wishes and the assurance of my prayers for the well-being of the nation.

At the heart of the Holy See's diplomatic activity stands a steadfast commitment to defending the dignity of the human person. This promotion of human rights, social justice and solidarity, arises out of the recognition of the common origin of all life and points to the common destiny of all men and women. In this broad perspective, humanity's transcendent dimension is brought to light, countering the social fragmentation and secularism so sadly prevalent in many societies today and providing a sure foundation for solidarity and harmony in our world. Within the international community Norway has long been esteemed for its generosity to developing nations. Tangible expressions of this are found, for example, in Norwegian participation in peace-keeping operations, assistance with aid projects, readiness to combat arms trafficking as well as championing of the causes of sustainable development and environmental protection. These acts of solidarity are an expression of a persevering desire to promote the common good and, at their most significant level, help to elicit a recognition of the essential nature of human life as a gift and of our world as a family of persons. In fact, genuine acts of solidarity are more than just unilateral gestures of good intent. They uphold God's universal plan for humanity and, in accord with this vision, address the complex challenges of justice, freedom of peoples and peace. Mr Ambassador, as you have correctly noted, Christianity has been of fundamental importance in Norway's history. It must be likewise in the present and in the future. In my pastoral visit to your country, I came as a pilgrim wishing to honour the lives of Saint Olaf and the other great Saints of the North, whose example still speaks today about the profound truths and values which have shaped Norwegian culture for over a thousand years. These guiding principles retain their significance for contemporary society, since they reveal "man's deepest sphere" and give "meaning to his life in the world" (cf.

Redemptor Hominis, 10). Indeed, as seen in extraordinary ways through the witness of the Saints, the values at the heart of Christian Europe call all men and women "to direct their steps towards a truth which transcends them" (*Fides et Ratio*, 5) so that good may prevail and God may be honoured. When individuals lose sight of this goal, which is their only guarantee of freedom and happiness, they become entrapped by impoverished ideologies and then fail to lift their gaze to the heights of life's purpose. In this regard, one cannot but notice that an eclipse of the sense of God has cast its shadow not only over your own country but over other Nordic lands as well. In this disquieting process of secularization, as I have noted on many occasions, it is marriage and the family which come under greatest threat. For this reason I continue to urge both religious and civil leaders to uphold the sacred institution of marriage, willed by God in the very act of creation, with its concomitant of stable domestic life. The truth of human sexuality is illustrated in the beauty of married couples' love as a unique and exclusive gift of self to the other and the mutual acceptance of that wonderful gift by which they become cooperators with God in giving life to a new human person (cf. *Familiaris Consortio*, 14). Secular and pragmatic distortions of the reality of marriage can never be equated with the splendour of a life-long covenant based on generous self-giving and unconditional love and they will only damage the foundation upon which the legitimate aspirations of a nation are built. From the beginning of my Pontificate I have made commitment to ecumenism a priority of my pastoral concern and action. Awareness of the common history shared by Christians has fostered brotherhood and dialogue, and united Christian witness for the advancement of the kingdom of God in our midst (cf. *Ut Unum Sint*, 41). To this end I encourage all the religious leaders of your nation to persevere along the path towards Christian unity. In this way they will help all Norwegians to draw on their rich heritage of over a thousand years of Christian faith: in Christ all people – nationals, migrants or foreigners – are brothers and sisters, and our gestures of solidarity towards them become acts of love and fidelity to Christ, who came that we might all have life and have it abundantly (cf. *Jn 10:10*). With these words of encouragement I assure you that the Catholic Church will continue to work for the spiritual enrichment and social development of the Norwegian people. Through her witness of charity the Church reaches out to all men and women, irrespective of ethnicity or religion, facilitating the growth of a "culture of solidarity" and restoring life to the universal values of human coexistence (cf. *Ecclesia in Europa*, 85). Mr Ambassador, I am confident that the mission which you begin today will help to strengthen the cordial bonds of understanding and cooperation between Norway and the Holy See. As you take up your new responsibilities be assured that the various offices of the Roman Curia are ready to assist you in the fulfilment of your duties. Upon you, your family and your fellow citizens I invoke the abundant blessings of Almighty God.

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