



The Holy See

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

Saturday, 7 April 2001

Mr Ambassador,

1. I am very pleased to welcome Your Excellency to the Vatican for the presentation of the Letters accrediting you as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Federative Republic of Brazil to the Holy See.

This pleasant occasion gives me the opportunity once again to experience the spiritual closeness which the Brazilian people foster for the Successor of Peter; at the same time it offers me the occasion to express once again my sincere affection and high esteem for your noble nation.

I warmly thank you for your kind words to me. I am especially grateful for the cordial thoughts and greetings which the President of the Republic, Mr Fernando Henrique Cardoso, wished to send to me. I ask your Excellency to be so kind as to reciprocate his greetings on my behalf, as well as my best wishes for good things.

2. Mr Ambassador, you mentioned the special moment in history which the universal Church and the Brazilian nation have been living since the celebration of the Great Jubilee, with the felicitous coincidence of the celebrations commemorating the 500th anniversary of the discovery and evangelization of the people of the Land of the Holy Cross. I pray God that Brazil will be able to preserve this very rich patrimony of spiritual and moral values, not only for the generations of today but also for the future generations that will come, eager to know the reasons for true hope (cf. 1 Pt 3: 15), like a seed sown in fertile soil, together with those responsible for the destiny of the nation.

3. Since then, I have wished to confirm your foresight in stressing the need for an ethic that is

authentically universal, transcending ideologies, restoring confidence to the world and giving savour to life.

Today, Brazil's leadership in the concert of Latin American nations is taking on ever greater importance and it is necessary to emphasize the contribution it is making to its neighbours' progress, not only in the economic field but also in the socio-political field. Consequently, I cannot fail to point out now the initiatives for promoting peace which have exercised a notable influence on the consolidation of democracy.

In turn, this influence should reflect a leadership that is necessarily linked to the principles of justice and freedom that continually witness to the values of human dignity. Priorities remain the effort to overcome social imbalances, the promotion and defence of the rights of women and children, better conditions in prisons and religious teaching at educational centres.

With all this, I am sure that Your Excellency will agree with me that as priority concerns of the Brazilian government, they require respect for human life in every sector of society. Today there is an inert mass of people subjected to the media, mesmerized by the influence of a globalizing culture and drawn towards an individualistic view of personal freedom undermining the value of human life, the family and the indissolubility of marriage. What causes concern is the misconception that considers as "normal", situations which have already been accepted by developed societies; failure to incorporate them into the culture is thought to imply a backward step in the progress and well-being of individuals.

4. Mr Ambassador, the Church, in her role as mother and teacher, will never stop insisting on the basic principles of human existence established by our Creator. Not only are the loss of faith or its ineffectiveness in life at stake, but also the relaxing or obscuring of the moral sense, due to the lack of the formation of conscience by the moral principles of the Gospel. In the Encyclical *Veritatis splendor* I affirmed that "today's widespread tendencies towards subjectivism, utilitarianism and relativism appear not merely as pragmatic attitudes or patterns of behaviour, but rather as approaches having a basis in theory and claiming full cultural and social legitimacy" (n. 106).

Brazil's condition as a generally Catholic country, influenced by a profound impact of the faith, which was celebrated by the commemorations of the fifth centenary of its discovery, expressed the spiritual, cultural and moral identity of its people. One can never tire of pointing out the impact of the Gospel, considering that Christian formation was one of the crucial factors which contributed to the nation's peace and stability, without any major disturbances, down through these five centuries of history. The Church, therefore, in recalling basic Gospel principles in the life of every citizen and every community, does nothing more than show her zeal for such a spiritual and moral heritage, which has so often been preserved at the cost of the bloodshed of the martyrs, of the present and past, as was the case of the "protomartyrs of Brazil", in Rio Grande do Norte, whom I had the joy of beatifying last year.

It is of course the Church's responsibility to continue the task of evangelization, obeying the divine mandate to go into the whole world preaching the Gospel to all nations (cf. Mt 28: 19). However, respecting the traditional principles of independence between both institutions, she is grateful to the State for its collaboration in her arduous mission. In this regard, I express the hope that the movement of missionaries, both inside and outside the nation, will become easier. It is a matter of relying on new labourers for the Lord's harvest, which is indispensable today.

5. I have also been able to continue a frank and open dialogue with the representatives of the Brazilian Government, in the first place with the President and through my direct co-workers in the Apostolic See. My pastoral visits to your land have left a deep impression, giving me good reasons for hoping that Brazil will continue to be the leader of many South American countries.

As I said above, Brazil's presence in the United Nations and in the international organizations for trade, development and cooperation is increasingly important and influential. I express the hope that the principles which inspired your participation in the society of nations will be guided by criteria whose fundamental rule consists of respect for human dignity, especially with regard to the life of unborn children, today seriously threatened by the reproductive techniques attacking human dignity.

However, this is not all: the drug trade, corruption at every level, inequality among social groups and the irrational destruction of the environment, as I have already said on previous occasions, show that "in the absence of moral points of reference, an unbridled greed for wealth and power takes over, obscuring any Gospel-based vision of social reality" (*Ecclesia in America*, n. 56).

The promotion of the values of peace, freedom, solidarity and defence of the neediest must inspire private and public life

6. As a result, sharing in the hopes of all Brazilians, I would like to repeat to you, Mr Ambassador, the Church's firm desire to collaborate, within her own mission, in all initiatives that aim at serving the cause of "the whole human person and of the whole of mankind". Thus she will continue with determination in her commitment to promote the values of peace, freedom, solidarity, and defence of the neediest that must inspire both private and public life. Faith and commitment to Jesus Christ require the Catholic faithful, also in Brazil, to become instruments of reconciliation and brotherhood, in truth, justice and love.

Mr Ambassador, before concluding, I ask you to convey my best wishes for happiness and peace to the President of the Republic. Furthermore, I would like to tell you that you can rely on the esteem, cordial welcome and support of this Apostolic See in the fulfilment of your mission, which I hope will be successful and fruitful.

At this moment, my thoughts turn to all Brazilians and to those who guide their destiny. I wish them

all happiness with greater progress and harmony. I am certain that Your Excellency will convey these sentiments and hopes to your President. Through the intercession of Our Lady of Aparecida, I ask almighty God to pour out an abundance of his blessings upon you, your mandate and your relatives, as well as upon all our beloved sons and daughters of the noble Brazilian nation.

**L'Osservatore Romano. Weekly edition in English n.20 p.8.*

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