



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO H.E. Mrs ANNE LEAHY
AMBASSADOR OF CANADA TO THE HOLY SEE**

Thursday, 30 October 2008

Madam Ambassador,

With joy I welcome you on the occasion of the presentation of the Letters accrediting you as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Canada to the Holy See. I thank you for the warm greetings you have conveyed to me on behalf of Her Excellency, the Governor-General of Canada. I should be grateful to you if you could reciprocate my cordial wishes for her person and for the entire people of Canada, with the hope that the new legislature which is starting in your country can serve to promote the common good and consolidate an ever more fraternal society.

The trusting dialogue which you, your Excellency, have the duty to hold between Canada and the Holy See has a long history, since, as you have observed, in a few months we shall be celebrating the 40th anniversary of the establishment of our Diplomatic Relations. The ties between the Apostolic See and your country go back several centuries. These relations have conferred a special tone both to the presence of the Church as well as to the attention that the Holy See pays to your Country. Indeed it is significant that Pope John Paul II made three Apostolic Journeys to Canada, [the last of which took place in 2002](#) on the occasion of the [17th World Youth Day](#) to the success of which you contributed personally. I now wish to recall what my venerable Predecessor said on his arrival in Toronto addressing the Prime Minister: "Canadians are heirs to an extraordinarily rich humanism, enriched even more by the blend of many different cultural elements. But the core of your heritage is the spiritual and transcendent vision of life based on Christian revelation which gave vital impetus to your development as a free, democratic and caring society, recognized throughout the world as a champion of human rights and human dignity" ([Address on Arrival at Toronto International Airport](#), 23 July 2002). In this perspective I am particularly pleased to see the strengthening of the bonds of understanding between the Catholic

Church and the indigenous communities of Canada, a very positive sign of which was the visit of one of their representatives at the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops.

I am also pleased at the country's commitment to develop multilateral cooperation to solve the numerous problems that challenge humanity in our time. Canada's participation in the international community's efforts to seek and consolidate peace and reconciliation in various regions of the planet represents an important contribution to establishing a more just and solidary world where every human person is respected in his fundamental vocation. In this regard we may mention Canada and the Holy See's, as well as other countries', commitment to support the application of the Convention for the ban of anti-personnel landmines and to promote it worldwide. This Convention which is an international instrument has registered a success seldom matched in recent times in the sphere of disarmament, demonstrating, as Pope John Paul ii said, that "when States join forces in a climate of understanding, mutual respect and cooperation to combat a culture of death and confidently build a culture of life, the cause of peace gains ground in individual consciences and in the whole of humanity" (*Message for the First Conference on the Anti-Personnel Landmine Ban Treaty*, n. 3, dated 22 November 2004). In the same way Canada and the Holy See, together with other countries, are endeavouring to contribute to the stability, peace and development of the Great Lakes Region in Africa.

As you have observed, Madam Ambassador, thanks to the institutions that it has created and the culture it has promoted, Catholicism has constituted one of the essential keys in building Canadian society. Yet, in our times, profound changes have taken place and will continue to take place. The signs of these transformations are visible in different environments and are worrisome at times even to the point of making us ask ourselves whether they do not mark a regression in the conception of the human being. They regard, above all, the areas of defence and the promotion of life and of the family founded on natural matrimony. Being well known, it is not necessary to dwell at length on these points.

In this context, I would rather like to encourage all Canadians, men and women, to profoundly reflect on the path that Christ invites us to tread. It is luminous and full of truth. A culture of life could refresh the entire personal and social existence of Canadians. I know that it is possible and that your country is capable of it. To contribute to it I think it is necessary to redefine the meaning of the exercise of freedom, an expression all too often invoked to justify certain excesses. Ever increasingly, in fact, its exercise is perceived only as an absolute value an inalienable right of the individual thus ignoring the importance of the divine origins of freedom and of its communal dimensional, which is necessary to edify it. According to this interpretation, the individual alone could decide and choose the features, characteristics and purpose of life, death and matrimony. True freedom is founded and develops ultimately in God. It is a gift that can be welcomed as a seed and brought to maturation in a responsible way that truly enriches the person and society. The exercise of this freedom means reference to a natural moral law, universal in character, which precedes and unites all rights and duties. In this prospective, I wish to lend my support to the

initiatives of Canadian Bishops in favour of family life, and therefore to promote the dignity of the human person.

Among the ecclesial institutions of your country, Your Excellency, the Catholic schools play an important role in human and spiritual education of youth and thus they render a service of great value to your nation. Religious teaching must therefore occupy the position it is due, with respect for every student's conscience. In fact, it is an inalienable right of parents to guarantee religious education to their own children. The teaching of religion, for the specific contribution it can offer, represents a fundamental and indispensable resource for an education that has among its principal objectives the construction of the student's character and the development of his or her capacity, integrating the mental, emotional and spiritual dimensions. Contributing in this way to the transmission of faith to new generations and preparing them to dialogue with the various members of the nation, Catholic schools respond to the constant demand of the Church's mission, for the good of all, and they enrich the whole of Canadian society.

Madam Ambassador, signs of hope are not lacking today. Along these lines, I am delighted at the complete success of the [49th International Eucharistic Congress](#) that concluded in your country last 22 June. With this important ecclesial meeting, we could discern an encouraging sign from the fact that the old roots of the tree of Catholicism are still alive in Canada and that they can make it blossom again. Many pilgrims were able to benefit from the generous hospitality of your people. I wish to warmly thank the authorities of your country for the efforts made to promote this event. Faithful to a long tradition, notwithstanding the difficulties of our age, Canada has remained a welcoming land. I encourage the men and women of Canada to generously follow this fine tradition of openness, above all in regard to the most fragile people.

I welcome the occasion, Your Excellency, to ask you to warmly greet the Catholic community of your country. In the often complex context in which the Church is called to carry out her mission, I encourage the Bishops and the faithful to continue to place their own hope in the Word of God and to fearlessly witness to the power of divine love among their fellow citizens. May the work of Christians in the life of society always be an expression of love that seeks the integral good of humankind!

As you begin your mission, rest assured that you will always find a welcome among my colleagues. I offer you, Madam Ambassador, my cordial wishes for the felicitous fulfilment of your office, so that the harmonious relations existent between Canada and the Holy See may continue and deepen. Upon you, Your Excellency, upon your family and your colleagues, and also upon the authorities and inhabitants of Canada, I wholeheartedly invoke the abundance of divine Blessings.

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