



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO H.E. MR. ALMIR FRANCO DE SÁ BARBUDA,
NEW AMBASSADOR OF BRAZIL TO THE HOLY SEE***

Monday, 31 October 2011

Mr Ambassador,

In receiving the Letters of Credence accrediting you as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Federative Republic of Brazil to the Holy See, I offer you my respectful good wishes as I welcome and thank you for your meaningful words, expressing the sentiments you nourish in your heart at the beginning of your new mission.

I accept with great pleasure the greetings that you conveyed to me on behalf of H.E. Ms Dilma Rousseff, President of the Republic, and I ask you, Mr Ambassador, kindly to express to her my gratitude in return. I also ask you to assure her of my respectful good wishes for the success of her lofty mission, as well as of my prayers for the prosperity and wellbeing of all Brazilians. Their affection, which I felt during my [Pastoral Visit in 2007](#), has remained indelibly impressed in my mind.

I note with great appreciation and deep gratitude the readiness shown by the different sectors of the nation's Government, as well as by its diplomatic representation to the Holy See, in support of the 28th World Youth Day which, God willing, will be held in Rio de Janeiro in 2013.

As you mentioned, Mr Ambassador, shortly after obtaining its Independence as a nation Brazil established diplomatic relations with the Holy See. This was indeed the culmination of the fruitful common history that Brazil and the Catholic Church share, which began during the first Mass celebrated on 26 April 1500 leaving testimonies in so many cities baptized with the names of saints of the Christian tradition and in numerous religious monuments. Some of these, such as the statue of Christ the Redeemer, his arms wide open in the gesture of blessing the entire nation,

have become worldwide symbols of the country's identity. Yet beyond the actual buildings, the Church has contributed to forging the Brazilian spirit, characterized by generosity, diligence, the appreciation of family values and the defence of human life in all its phases.

An important chapter in this fruitful common history was written when the Agreement was signed by the Holy See and the Brazilian Government in 2008. Far from being a source of privileges for the Church to the detriment of secular identity of the State, this agreement aims solely to give official and juridical recognition to the independent collaboration of these two entities. Inspired by the words of her Divine Founder, who ordered people to give to Caesar "the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's" (Mt 22:21), was how the Church expressed her position at the Second Vatican Council: "the political community and the Church are autonomous and independent of each other in their own fields. Nevertheless, both are devoted to the personal vocation of man, though under different titles" (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 76).

The Church hopes that the State, in its turn, will recognize that a healthy secularism must not view religion, simply as an individual sentiment that can be relegated to the private sphere but rather as a reality which, also organized in visible structures, needs her public presence in the community in order to be recognized.

This is why the State is responsible for guaranteeing the possibility of the free exercise of worship of every religious denomination, as well as its cultural, educational and charitable activities, as long as they are not in opposition to the moral and public order. Well, the Church's contribution is not limited to supportive, concrete social, humanitarian and educational initiatives and so forth, but gives special consideration to the growth of social ethics, promoted by many signs of openness to the transcendent and by the formation of consciences sensitive to the fulfilment of the duties of solidarity. The Agreement signed between Brazil and the Holy See is therefore the guarantee that enables the ecclesial community to develop its full potential for the benefit of every human person and of the entire Brazilian society.

Among these areas of mutual collaboration I would like to stress here, Mr Ambassador, that of education to which the Church has contributed with countless educational institutions whose prestige is recognized by society as a whole. The role of education cannot, in fact, be reduced to the mere transmission of knowledge and skills that aim to form a professional but must include all the aspects of the person, from his social side to his yearning for the transcendent.

For this reason it is appropriate to reaffirm, as was confirmed in the above-mentioned Agreement of 2008, that far from implying that the State assumes or imposes a specific religious creed, denominational religious teaching in state schools, means recognition of religion as a necessary value for the person's integral formation. And the teaching in question cannot be reduced to a generic sociology of religions, because there is no such thing as generic, non-denominational

religion. Thus, not only does denominational religious teaching in state schools do no damage to the secularism of the State, but in addition it guarantees the right of their parents to choose the education for their children, thereby contributing to promote the common good.

Lastly, in the field of social justice the Brazilian Government knows it can count on the Church as a privileged partner in all its initiatives that aim to uproot hunger and poverty. The Church “cannot and must not replace the State. Yet at the same time she cannot and must not remain on the sidelines in the fight for justice” (Encyclical Letter *Deus Caritas Est*, n. 28). This is why she will always gladly contribute to the assistance of the neediest people, helping them to raise themselves from their situation of wretchedness, poverty and exclusion.

Mr Ambassador, as I conclude this meeting I renew my good wishes to you for the success of your mission. The various Dicasteries of the Roman Curia will always be at your service as you carry it out.

I invoke from Almighty God, through the intercession of Our Lady of Aparecida, abundant blessings for you personally, for all your loved ones and for the Federative Republic of Brazil, which you, Your Excellency, have the honour to represent to the Holy See from this moment.

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