



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO H.E. Mr THOMAS PATRICK MELADY
NEW AMBASSADOR OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
TO THE HOLY SEE***

Tuesday, 3 October 1989

Mr Ambassador,

With great pleasure I welcome you to the Vatican and accept the Letters accrediting you as the Ambassador of the United States of America to the Holy See. It is my fervent hope that your mission will contribute to strengthening the good relations existing between the United States and the Holy See, and that the fruitful dialogue which was begun under your two predecessors will continue. I ask you to convey my cordial greetings to President Bush, assuring him and all your fellow citizens of my prayerful good wishes.

In your address, you referred to a growing conviction within the international community that religious freedom is to be recognized and protected as a fundamental human right. The Holy See has constantly proclaimed that the human person has an inalienable right to pursue the truth, to worship God and to act in accordance with the dictates of conscience (Cfr. *Dignitatis Humanae*, 2). This right to religious freedom must be safeguarded by the laws which govern nations. Wherever freedom of religion is denied or curtailed, human dignity itself is violated, and genuine progress toward a social order marked by justice and peace is seriously compromised.

In my recent Encyclical, "*Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*", I argued that the violation of fundamental human rights constitutes a kind of impoverishment as serious as any material poverty (Cfr. Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 15). In this regard, I have often stressed the necessity of democratic and participatory forms of government for the growth of an orderly political life. Indeed, "the 'health' of a political community – as expressed in the free and responsible participation of all citizens in public affairs, in the rule of law and in respect for and promotion of human rights – is the necessary

condition and sure guarantee of the development of "the whole individual and of all people" (*Ibid.* 44). Only where human freedom is fostered and protected can a social order develop which is capable of responding to the needs and aspirations of the men and women of today.

Two years ago, in the course of my second Pastoral Visit to the United States, I was pleased to recall that from the very beginning of America's history freedom has been the principle at the basis of the formation of a well-ordered society. The Constitution of the United States bears eloquent witness to your country's belief that the freedom of individuals is indispensable for the pursuit of the common good. Accordingly, the United States has come to enjoy an experience, tested by time, that a disciplined and generous freedom is the path to peace, to a just social order and to the achievement of the good of the nation.

During my Pastoral Visit I recall having spoken on the theme of freedom at the Ecumenical Prayer Service held in Columbia, South Carolina. On that occasion, I expressed the conviction that there can be no true freedom without moral accountability. The conquest of freedom does not lie in rejecting objective norms of conduct or in refusing to assume personal responsibility. True freedom implies that we acknowledge our accountability for the good that we fail to do and the evil we commit. The strength or weakness of individuals and of whole societies depends on how clearly they grasp this moral imperative (Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Allocutio, in urbe "Columbia", ad sodales aliarum communionum christianarum, die 11 sept. 1987: Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II, X, 3 [1987] 400 ss.*).

Dramatic events in recent months have drawn the world's attention to the enduring desire of entire peoples to experience the blessings of freedom and self-determination. Yet, as the lessons of your country's history have demonstrated, these blessings are often secured at great sacrifice, and may not be taken for granted from generation to generation. In every age, new challenges arise and must be confronted with confidence and resolution. The profound threat to human freedom posed by the illegal traffic in narcotics is but one example. The curse of drug addiction, which hovers like a dark cloud over entire nations, is surely one of the most serious menaces to freedom in our time.

I thank you, Mr. Ambassador, for your reference to Lebanon. The present situation in that country is of utmost concern to the Holy See, as I have repeatedly manifested in appeals and public prayers for the end of violence and for the beginning of a new era of peace and progress in that sorely tried land. The Apostolic See hopes that present and future efforts to secure the normalization of life in Lebanon will help to strengthen the unity of her people as a free and sovereign nation.

You have also drawn attention to the Holy See's work for the promotion of peace and a just social order in Africa. I am particularly pleased to note the assistance given to Africa's many developing countries as they continue to take their place within the family of nations. In calling for a spirit of solidarity with them, I am well aware of the great human resources which they have to offer to the

world at large. Your own knowledge and experience of that Continent will surely confirm this judgment. I am confident that the United States will continue its generous support of these nations which are seeking development in accord with their own highest aspirations.

Mr Ambassador, there are reasons for gratitude as we contemplate the signs of hope reflected in the present world situation. Yet many of these signs of hope are fragile and in need of wise and careful stewardship. The presence of the Holy See in the international community seeks to promote a deeper reflection on the basic spiritual truths and values involved in human life. As a nation which exercises great influence throughout the world, I pray that America will be ever sensitive to this spiritual dimension of all human activity.

While assuring you of the cooperation of the various departments of the Holy See in the fulfillment of your new mission, I express once again my abiding esteem for the people of the United States of America. May God bless you and your important work.

*AAS 82 (1990), p.343-346.

Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II, vol. XII, 1 pp. 744-747

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