



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS
POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO H.E. Mr FERNANDO HENRIQUE CARDOSO,
PRESIDENT OF THE FEDERATIVE REPUBLIC OF BRAZIL***

Friday, 14 February 1997

Mr President,

1. It is a great pleasure for me on the important occasion of this official visit on which Your Excellency, as chief executive of the Federative Republic of Brazil, and accompanied by the distinguished dignitaries of your entourage, comes to Rome to meet the Successor of Peter. In your person, I see the whole Brazilian nation, from north to south and from east to west. I wish to meet you at this time to convey to you my most cordial greetings and best wishes for peace and prosperity in every corner of this continent-country.

I do so with the greatest esteem in order to express my highest regard, but especially as a reflection of the excellent relations between the Holy See and Brazil, which are being constantly fostered and strengthened by sincere collaboration between the local Church and the State. With these relations, respectful of one another's independence, the Church is not seeking privileges, but sufficient space to carry out her mission for the common good in the area of religion, at the service of man and woman in the full truth of their existence as persons and as members of the community and society, in the many relations, contacts, situations and structures that join them to others of the same country.

2. In addition to our good relations, something else adds to the joy of our meeting: the fact that the majority of your people profess the Catholic religion, with a glorious past of devotion to the cause of Christ and the Church and of distinguished evangelization. At the end of this century, Brazil will be celebrating 500 years of history; undoubtedly this is a significant date because it enables Brazil, in the eyes of the community of nations, to affirm its outstanding individuality in the social,

economic and cultural fields, of great importance and full of promise for the new millennium now drawing near. In this regard the Church, God willing, will continue to collaborate in spreading the Gospel and will be attentive to the demands of her mission, sparing no sacrifice in order to make an ever greater contribution to the cause of the common good, as a sister with the same lofty aims as the Brazilian Government.

3. It is no secret, Mr President, that I have followed events in your country's religious and social life with keen interest. Brazil is currently undergoing a phase of progressive development at all levels of national life, thanks to a series of significant changes that enable it to look ahead with optimism to the future. After a turbulent period in their recent history, Brazilians are continuing to mature with regard to their rights and duties. This demands from their leaders diligent dedication and a respect in full harmony with the dignity of every human being, created in "the image of God" (Gn 1:27).

On the one hand, as I have recently had the opportunity to reiterate: "It is the task of nations, their leaders, their economic powers and all people of goodwill to seek every opportunity for a more equitable sharing of resources, which are not lacking, and of consumer goods; by this sharing, all will express their sense of brotherhood" (*Address at the FAO*, 13 November 1996, n. 2; *L'Osservatore Romano* English edition, 20 November 1996, p. 5). The domestic scene of Brazilian life is oriented to making a general effort of improvement, so that the just distribution of wealth will become an ever more widespread reality and will narrow the gap between rich and poor, with consideration for and solidarity with the underprivileged and the destitute. Respect for the indigenous peoples, commitment to an agrarian reform implemented in accordance with the laws in force, the protection of the environment, among other things, justify ever more courageous efforts aimed at ennobling the democratic cause. On the other hand, it is also essential to stress the undeniable rights of every human person in order to foster the cultural, spiritual and moral values that form a common heritage which must constantly be promoted and guaranteed. This must be done by starting with areas vital to the community, such as the family, children and youth, education and social welfare.

In these areas and expressions of human life, as in others, many needs arise that must be faced in conformity with the demands of justice, freedom and common solidarity; the Church also feels called to meet these needs, by virtue of the dimension of service to man belonging to her mission. On these lines, she will always act in defence of the needy, the poor and the marginalized, without neglecting any class of society, rich or poor, since all are God's children. This is why it is clear that her efforts to collaborate in establishing justice and peace become a preference for the protection of the most underprivileged, the abandoned, the elderly and, in general, all those who seek greater respect for their natural rights. She will make use of all available means to defend life from conception to its natural end. For this reason, when radically unjust legislation is introduced, such as abortion and euthanasia, she will continue to be the faithful and staunch defender of the moral rights of citizens who seek to have their convictions respected. The Church's Christian message

sheds full light on man and the meaning of his existence and his life; she will always seek in dialogue the commitment to awakening a new culture of life (cf. Encyc. Letter *Evangelium vitae*, nn. 69, 82).

4. Brazil's relations with its neighbours are currently in a phase of accelerated co-operation which, through Mercosur, is achieving an integration that will contribute to the member countries' economic and social prosperity, with opportunities for extending it to other geographical areas of the continent. However, for the achievement of really integral progress, attention must be paid to culture and education in authentic moral and spiritual values. The Church wishes to contribute to this task, making use of her rich heritage of centuries-old tradition to build up the basic values that are rooted in Christian faith and principles. Moreover, religious teaching in the public and private schools is moving in this direction, since provisions for it were made in the various constitutions which your country has had since the 1930's. The extraordinary importance of basing any individual and social structure on lasting principles does not consist merely in supplying information far removed from the real life of society. On the contrary, the Church is firmly determined to defend in practice the values of the home and of a correct view of the Christian family. Furthermore, with a little foresight, it is easy to see on the threshold of the third millennium that the welfare of society and of humanity itself is largely in the hands of women, of those who accept the role and task which they alone, and no one in their stead, can fulfil: that of being mothers of a family, teachers who form their children's personalities and are primarily responsible for the atmosphere in the home. No one will make the mistake of denying woman her right and duty to take part in and influence social life. In the world of science and the arts, of literature and communication, of politics, trade unions and universities, woman has her place and does very good work in it. However, it is also known to everyone that by serving the micro-society of the family with its own characteristics, the woman-wife-mother is directly serving the larger society and humanity itself. For this reason, "by defending the dignity of women and their vocation, the Church has shown honour and gratitude for those women who — faithful to the Gospel — have shared in every age in the apostolic mission of the whole People of God" (Apostolic Letter *Mulieris dignitatem*, n. 27).

5. Mr President, on this occasion I would like to assure you of the determined will of the Church in Brazil, shown on various occasions by the Bishops, her legitimate representatives, to continue to co-operate with the authorities and the different public institutions in serving the great causes of man and woman, as citizens and children of God (cf. *Gaudium et spes*, n. 76). I am therefore certain that our meeting will be a good omen for constructive and regular dialogue between the civil authorities and the Pastors of the Church and will further relations between the two institutions. For their part, the Episcopate, priests and religious communities will tirelessly continue their work of evangelization and of charitable and educational aid for the good of society. They are spurred to do so by their vocation of service to all, especially the neediest, and thus they contribute to the integral advancement of all Brazilians and the preservation and promotion of the highest values.

On this welcome and solemn occasion, as I confirm the Apostolic See's full esteem and concern for your country's welfare, I offer you once again my best wishes for sound progress, well-being and increasing prosperity in tranquil peace and harmony among all Brazilians, as they build an ever more human and fraternal Brazil, where each of its children, in the light of Christ, may feel fully involved in creating the nation's common history.

With these cordial wishes, I pray that God will always protect the beloved Brazilian people and help its leaders in their arduous task of serving the common good of the beloved children of this noble nation.

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