



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE BISHOPS OF BRAZIL
FROM THE SOUTH REGIONS III AND IV
ON THEIR "AD LIMINA" VISIT**

Tuesday, 26 November 2002

Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate,

1. Formed in an adult faith, the disciples of the Lord are called to proclaim and promote in the world, prey to growing uncertainties and fears, the transcendent realities of new life in Christ. At the same time, they must feel actively committed to contributing to the integral advancement of humanity, to the fostering of dialogue and understanding among individuals and peoples, for the development of justice and peace. As the *Epistle to Diognetus* says, Christians are the soul of the world (6,1). May every member of the faithful understand with a renewed consciousness his task to be the soul of the world!

This must be your priority concern, dear Brothers, Pastors of the beloved Church of the *South Regions III and IV*. Insist upon it in your pastoral programmes, seeing it as an exacting missionary challenge that must seriously challenge the entire community. In expressing my esteem for your generous apostolic work, I offer each one of you my fraternal and grateful greeting. In particular, I thank Archbishop *Dadeus Grings* of Porto Alegre and President of *South III Region* for the cordial sentiments he has expressed in your name; I also address my heartfelt gratitude to the Bishops who have retired from active pastoral ministry. May the Lord of the harvest who called you to work in his vineyard unite you all in his goodness!

2. In a situation in which freedom of speech is frequently used as a weapon to spread messages contrary to the teachings of Christian morality, may the honest public presence of Catholic thought not be absent. Faithful to Christ's mandate, the Church insists that the true and perennial "newness of things" comes from the infinite power of God: it is God who makes all things new (cf.

Apoc 21,5). The men and women redeemed by Christ share in this newness and are his dynamic collaborators. A socially insignificant faith would no longer be the faith exalted by the Acts of the Apostles and by the writings of Paul and John.

The Church does not claim to usurp the tasks and prerogatives of the political power; but she knows she must offer to politics her specific contribution of inspiration and direction on the great moral values. The necessary distinction between the Church and the public authorities must not make us forget that both are concerned with the human being; and the Church, "expert in humanity", cannot give up her mission of inspiring political activities to direct them toward the common good of society. This exacting mission requires daring, patience and confidence; it is no easy undertaking, especially in our day, since, as you yourselves observe, contemporary society is disoriented by an ideal and spiritual confusion.

3. In paragraph n. 12 of the Apostolic Letter *Tertio millennio adveniente*, in preparation for the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, I wanted to recall the tradition of the jubilee years of Israel, a time which was dedicated above all to God and during which, slaves were freed, property redistributed and debts written off. It was a question of applying a social justice that was the reflection of the joy of knowing it was a people chosen and loved by God. "The social doctrine of the Church ... is thus rooted in the tradition of the jubilee year" (*ibid.*, n. 13), together with the collection of principles and criteria which, as the fruit of Revelation and historical experience, were reflected on and gathered to promote the formation of the Christian conscience and the working out of justice in human society.

These principles and criteria take the most varied forms. For example, preferential love for the poor, so that they may attain a more dignified standard of living; the observance of obligations assumed in contracts and agreements; the protection of the fundamental rights that are essential to human dignity; the correct use of one's possessions for one's own benefit and at the same time for that of the community, in conformity with the social goal of ownership; the payment of taxes; the satisfactory and honest execution of assignments and responsibilities, in a spirit of service; integrity, both in the word given and in legal trials and judgements; the accomplishment of work with competence and dedication; respect for freedom of conscience; the accessibility of education and culture to all; attention to the sick and the unemployed. From a negative point of view, we can point out among the violations of justice: salaries that are insufficient for a worker to pay his family's keep; the unjust acquisition of the property of others; discrimination in work and affronts to the dignity of women; administrative or entrepreneurial corruption; excessive greed for money and wealth; urban planning which, in practice, leads to birth control due to financial pressure; campaigns that violate intimacy, honour or the right to information; technologies that damage the environment and so forth.

In the exercise of their threefold *munus* of sanctifying, teaching and governing, Bishops should help the faithful be genuine witnesses of the risen Jesus. It is not always easy to direct them in

their search for adequate responses that are in accord with the teaching of Jesus Christ to the challenges of the economic and social order.

4. It is nothing new to observe that your country is living with a historical deficit of social development, whose worst aspect is the immense number of Brazilians who live in a situation of poverty and unequal distribution of income that is reaching very high levels. In spite of this however, the overall volume of the Brazilian economy places it among the first ten of the world, and the average per capita income is far superior to that of the poorest countries. Brazil offers the paradoxical spectacle of having a level of industrial, scientific and technological development that compares favourably with that of the industrialized world; yet it must live with a chronic economic marginalization of large segments of society, such as the mass of farmers without land, the small-scale land owners impoverished and crippled by debt, and the vast number of marginalized city workers, the result of internal migration and rapid changes in the structure of employment.

5. Poverty and social injustice in Brazil began in the colonial period and in the first years of its Independence. Development programmes applied during the 20th century have ensured the combination of the country's material growth, the development of a diversified urban-industrial economy and a responsible middle class, full of creativity and initiative. This progress has not been able to eliminate poverty and calamity nor to reduce the inequality of wealth and income, which recently has become even more pronounced.

Perhaps the economic history of Brazil is a valid proof of the inability of economic systems to resolve by themselves the problems of human development without being accompanied and corrected by a *strong ethical foundation* and the constant will to serve the human person.

Several years ago, at the time of the collapse of the Berlin wall and the failure of Marxism, I recalled that "it is not possible to understand man on the basis of economics alone, nor to define him simply on the basis of class membership" (*Centesimus annus*, n. 24). Likewise, man cannot be judged as a mere component of the market economy since "even prior to the logic of a fair exchange of goods and the forms of justice appropriate to it, there exists *something which is due to man because he is man*, by reason of his lofty dignity. Inseparable from that required "something" is the possibility to survive and at the same time, to make an active contribution to the common good of humanity" (*ibid.*, n. 34).

The economic experiences recorded in Brazil from the 1940s - substitution of imports, protected industrialization, entrepreneurial action by the State, assisted expansion in the agricultural sector, etc., sought to combine the elements of the great economic systems then in force, undoubtedly encouraging global growth. They did not achieve the primary goal of a significant reduction of poverty. The recent plans to stabilize the currency, to introduce modern technology and commercial openings, despite their effectiveness, have only led to the partial achievement of this objective.

In fact, besides insufficient measures for social protection and the redistribution of income, what has really been lacking is an *ethical conception of social life*. The mere implementation of long-term plans and measures to correct the existing imbalances can never do without the commitment of institutional and personal solidarity on the part of all Brazilians. To this end, Catholics, who account for the majority of the Brazilian population, can make a fundamental contribution.

6. The new international scene, the result of globalization, obliges States to make important decisions about their capacity to intervene in economic life even in the endeavour to correct imbalances and social injustice.

Already in 1967, my venerable predecessor Paul VI, drew attention to the growing interdependence of peoples and pointed out that countries can no longer live in isolation; it was emphasized at the time that the process of their interdependence could be counterbalanced by a globalization of solidarity, in which the stronger nations might guarantee certain financial and commercial benefits to the weaker ones, to help, as far as possible, to level the international imbalances; otherwise, on the contrary, it might serve to accentuate deviations (cf. *Populorum progressio*, nn. 54-55). Unfortunately, still today globalization often works to benefit the strongest, ensuring that the current advantages of technological development be connected with the prevalent international structure.

Like other states, your country is also conditioned by the international situation, but it has a sufficiently strong economy that has so far enabled it to face the recurrent global financial crises.

The people, moreover, have confidence in their own currency and in the functioning of their institutions. You must therefore thank God because, above and beyond external conditioning, in society as a whole the basic elements exist to solve the social problems. It is possible to work in Brazil for a more just society and involvement in this work is a requisite that stems from the spread of the Gospel message.

7. It is up to you, venerable Brothers, as the hierarchy of the people of God, to promote the quest for new solutions that embody a Christian spirit. A vision of the economy and social problems in the perspective of the Church's social teaching, never fails to lead us to consider things from the standpoint of human dignity, which transcends the play of purely economic factors. Moreover, it helps people understand that to obtain social justice, more is required than the simple application of ideological schemes originating in the class struggle, such as the occupation of land, which I already criticized during my Pastoral Visit of 1991, and of public or private buildings, or, to quote one example, the adoption of extreme technical measures which could have far more serious consequences than the injustice they are intended to overcome, such as in the case of a unilateral failure to fulfil international obligations.

What is most important and most effective, according to the mission Jesus Christ has entrusted to

the bishops is to stimulate the full potential and talents of the People of God, especially of the laity, so that authentic justice and solidarity may reign in Brazil, as the fruit of an integral Christian life. In a true democracy there must always be legal room so that, without recourse to violence, groups can create ways of exerting just pressure to speed up the achievement of equity and justice for all.

8. You must therefore work tirelessly for the formation of politicians, of all Brazilians who have the power to make decisions, however great or small they may be, and in general, of all the members of society, so that they may fully assume their responsibilities and be able to give a human and solidary face to the economy.

It is necessary to instil a genuine spirit of truthfulness and honesty into the political and entrepreneurial leaders. Those who play a leading role in society must seek to foresee the direct and indirect, short- and long-term social consequences of their decisions, acting to maximize the common good, rather than seeking their own personal gain. Christians must be ready to relinquish an economic or social advantage if it has not been obtained by absolutely honest means, not only in accord with civil law but also with the supreme moral model indicated by the very name of Christian, followers in the footsteps of Christ on earth.

9. Living consistently as Christians means transforming one's life into a constant and generous service to one's neighbour.

In my *[Letter to Priests for Holy Thursday 2002](#)*, speaking of the sacrament of Penance, I sought to foster in my brother priests Jesus' friendship with Zacchaeus: from a man who lived by exploiting his brothers, he became a man who decides to give a generous portion of his possessions to the poor, and to remedy the injustices he had committed. The episode of Zacchaeus, recounted by the Evangelist Luke, points to the way of exercising the preferential option for the poor. It is not a classist option, but serves all Christians and all people, rich and poor alike, whatever their political party or opinion, as the foundation for drawing near to Christ's spirit, to awaken in them the miracle of mercy. By so doing, venerable Brothers, you will succeed in ensuring that in their lives, all Brazilians, like Zacchaeus, opt for their brothers and sisters, and you will reveal to Christians and to all people of goodwill in Brazil the infinite potential of God's love.

In political and economic thought and action, many initiatives will flourish to protect the common good - economy of communion and participation, initiatives of educational and social assistance, innovative forms of assistance for the needy population, etc. - which will express the variety of the people of God and the immeasurable human and spiritual riches of the people of this great nation.

10. Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate, never let the challenges of your work weaken your enthusiasm; be apostles of optimism and hope, instilling confidence in your closest collaborators and in the whole of society, in your episcopal Regions.

May the Saints and Blesseds of the Land of the Holy Cross help you in the exalted mission of building the Kingdom of God. May Our Lady, *Nossa Senhora Aparecida*, venerated with a specially intense devotion by your people protect you. I entrust to her vigilant and motherly protection your apostolic plans and the material and spiritual needs of the Dioceses of which you are Pastors. Receive my Apostolic Blessing which I willingly extend to all those entrusted to your care.