



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO THE BISHOPS OF THE EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE OF BRAZIL
(NORTH EAST V REGION) ON THEIR "AD LIMINA" VISIT**

Thursday, 28 October 2010

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate,

“Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Cor 1:2).

I would first like to thank God for your zeal and dedication to Christ and to his Church which is developing in the North East V Region. In reading your reports I have been able to take stock of the religious and pastoral as well as the human and social problems that you must deal with every day. The general picture has its shadows but also signs of hope, as Bishop Xavier Gilles has just said to me in his greeting, expressing the sentiments of all of you and of your people.

As you know, at previous meetings with various Regions of the National Bishops' Conference of Brazil, I have stressed the different areas and respective sections of the Church's multiform evangelizing and pastoral service in your great nation; today I would like to speak to you of how the Church, in her mission of developing and illuminating human society with the Gospel, teaches man his dignity as a son of God and his vocation to union with all men and women, from whom the requirements of justice and social peace derive in conformity with divine wisdom.

In the meantime, the immediate duty to work for a just social order is incumbent on the lay faithful who, as free and responsible citizens, strive to contribute to the right configuration of social life, with respect for its legitimate autonomy and for the natural moral order (cf. *Deus Caritas Est*, n. 29).

Your duty as Bishops with your clergy is mediated since it is your task to contribute to purifying reason and reawakening the moral forces necessary to build a just and fraternal society. However,

when the fundamental rights of the person or the salvation of souls so require, it is the serious duty of Pastors to issue a moral judgement, even in political matters (cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 76).

In forming these opinions Pastors must keep in mind the absolute value of those negative moral precepts that hold as morally unacceptable the choice of a certain intrinsically evil action incompatible with the dignity of the human person. This decision cannot be redeemed by the goodness of any purpose, intention, consequence or circumstance. Therefore any defence of political, economic and social human rights would be totally false and deceptive that did not include a strong defence of a right to life from conception to natural death (cf. *Christifideles Laici*, n. 38).

Furthermore, in the context of work for the weakest and most defenceless, who is more helpless than a newborn infant or a sick person in a vegetative or terminal condition? When political projects contemplate, openly or in a veiled manner, the decriminalization of abortion or euthanasia, the democratic ideal — which is only truly such when it acknowledges and safeguards the dignity of every human person — is betrayed in its very foundations (*Evangelium Vitae*, n. 74).

Therefore dear Brothers in the Episcopate, in defending life “we must not fear hostility or unpopularity, and we must refuse any compromise or ambiguity which might conform us to the world's way of thinking” (n. 82).

In addition, the better to help lay people live their Christian and socio-political commitment in a uniform and consistent manner, as I said in Aparecida, “there will also need to be social catechesis and a sufficient formation in the social teaching of the Church, for which a very useful tool is the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*” (*Address at the Opening Session of the Fifth General Conference of the Latin American and Caribbean Bishops' Conferences*, n. 3).

This also means that on specific occasions, the Pastors must also remind all the citizens of the right, which is also a duty, to use their own vote freely in order to promote the common good (cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 75).

On this point politics and faith converge. Faith without any doubt, has the specific nature of an encounter with the living God which opens new horizons far beyond the context proper to reason.

“Without the corrective supplied by religion, though, reason too can fall prey to distortions, as when it is manipulated by ideology, or applied in a partial way that fails to take full account of the dignity of the human person” (*Discourse to Representatives of British Society*, Westminster Hall London, 17 September 2010).

A society can be built only by tirelessly respecting, promoting and teaching the transcendent nature of the human person. Thus God must find “a place in the public realm, specifically in regard

to its cultural, social, economic, and particularly its political dimensions” (*Caritas in Veritate*, n. 56).

For this reason, dear Brothers, I join my voice to yours in a lively appeal for religious education and, more practically, for the confessional and diversified teaching of religion in State schools.

I would also like to recall that the presence of religious symbols in public life is at the same time a reminder of man's transcendence and a guarantee of respect for him. They have a particular value in the case of Brazil where the Catholic religion is an integral part of its history. How can we fail to think at this time of the image of Jesus Christ with his arms out stretched over the Bay of Guanabara that represents the hospitality and love with which Brazil has always known how to open its arms to persecuted and needy men and women arriving from all over the world? It was in this presence of Jesus in Brazilian life that they were harmoniously integrated into society, contributing to enriching its culture, to its economic growth and to its spiritual of solidarity and freedom.

Dear Brothers, I entrust to the Mother of God and our Mother, invoked in Brazil with the title of *Nossa Senhora Aparecida*, these hopes of the Catholic Church in the Land of the Holy Cross and of all people of good will in defence of the values of human life and of its transcendence, together with the joys and hopes, the sorrows and anguish of the men and women of the Ecclesiastical Province of Maranhão. I entrust everyone to her maternal protection and I impart my Apostolic Blessing to you and to your people.

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