



The Holy See

***DISCURSO DO PAPA JOÃO PAULO II
AO SENHOR ANTÓNIO AUGUSTO DE MEDEIROS PATRÍCIO
NOVO EMBAIXADOR DE PORTUGAL JUNTO DA SANTA SÉ
POR OCASIÃO DA APRESENTAÇÃO
DAS CARTAS CREDENCIAIS****

Sábado, 20 de Fevereiro de 1993

1. With great satisfaction and esteem I bid you welcome during this audience in which you present the Letters accrediting you as the new Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Portugal to the Holy See. Your Excellency comes to take your place in a long line of your country's representatives who, throughout the centuries, have fulfilled the mission of maintaining and strengthening relations between the Apostolic See and the Portuguese nation, always so close to the solicitude and affection of the Successor of Peter, sentiments which have been faithfully and generously returned, as I have been able to experience in person.

The noble expression of the sentiments which fill you on this very significant day deserve all my attention and I am very grateful for them; please allow me to mention, first of all, the deferential greeting you conveyed to me on behalf of His Excellency the President of the Republic, Doctor Mario Soares: I entrust to you the task of expressing my heartfelt gratitude to the President, accompanied by my best wishes for his person and his noble mission, and for the welfare and increasing prosperity of all Portuguese.

2. Your Excellency, in your words I was able to see that you are assuming your new diplomatic responsibilities with a clear sense of the special nature of the Holy See's activity within the context of the international community. In fact «since the Church, in Christ, is in the nature of sacrament - a sign and instrument, that is, of communion with God and of unity among all people» (Lumen gentium, n. 1), her recourse to diplomacy includes the pressing need to affirm and give new energy, at the international level, to the unity of the human family and to the shared responsibility

of all for our destiny.

With this in view, «the Church calls upon all her members and upon all people to put aside, in the family spirit of the children of God, all conflict between nations and races» (Gaudium et spes, n.42). It is a source of consolation and hope to the Apostolic See to witness the spread and consolidation of an ever greater awareness of the unity of the whole human family and the radical interdependence of all people. An effect of this awareness is the fostering of a gradual conviction that only true solidarity, understood as a moral category which determines human relationships, can effectively safeguard the dignity and rights of individuals and, as a consequence, build peace within societies and among nations.

3. I was pleased by your reference to the Holy See's efforts to defend human dignity, promote social justice and inaugurate a lasting peace among peoples. These are ideals which Portugal also has worthily served and for which it will continue to struggle; here we should mention, as an example, Portugal's special contribution to the attainment of the Peace Accord for Angola which - it is my heartfelt wish and for this I insistently pray- will be a valid basis for understanding and an encouraging point of reference at this insane time of an absurd regression to recourse to arms.

4. In another area, there is the regrettable dispute between Portugal and Indonesia, with innumerable victims among the beloved Timorese people, whom I was able to embrace during my Pastoral Visit to Dili. Now that there are signs that direct dialogue may be possible the Pope expresses his fervent wish that all those involved will be prepared and committed to achieving it, with a firm desire to face the actual problems serenely and positively, determined to find solutions through dialogue, solidarity and forgiveness. I renew here the appeal I made on that memorable 12 October 1989 to all those having responsibility for life in East Timor, that they «act with wisdom and good will towards all, as they search for a just and peaceful resolution of present difficulties in order to bring about a speedy improvement of conditions of life which will permit (the Timorese) to live in social harmony, according to (their) own traditions and requirements, in serene and fruitful productivity» (Homily in Dili, n. 4; L'Osservatore Romano English edition, 23 October 1989, p. 6).

5. Mr. Ambassador, the Church, for her part, has been seeking to be renewed in order to accomplish faithfully her mission as time passes, drawing energy from the vision of what she is called to be by her divine Founder and Lord. How much the nations and their leaders wait for and look sympathetically to this witness of fidelity and ecclesial service has been made apparent in the reception given the recent Catechism of the Catholic Church. In it, besides the other truths nations will be able to find the deeply moral and religious foundations upon which they must build if they want to succeed in renewing their vision and decision-making capacity with respect for the common good and the dignity and fundamental rights of individuals and peoples.

I was pleased to find in your address a further expression of the political and cultural will which inspires the Lusitanian nation: to be a member in solidarity and full right of the new Europe, but

«without distancing itself from», in Your Excellency's words, 'the centuries-old values of Christianity, the moral basis of our civilization and ever stronger sine qua non of human development and the coexistence of peoples». May all Portuguese, under the patronage of the Blessed Virgin Mary, their Lady and Patroness continue to build the future of their sons and daughters on their traditional foundations: a living faith in Jesus Christ, a heroic defence of human life in all its phases; fraternal mutual aid and the peaceful coexistence of all peoples! May Portugal contribute decisively to giving new strength to Europe's Christian soul!

It is true that the political community and the Church, independently of one another and with autonomy in their respective fields of activity, are composed of the same people and serve the same social reality. Therefore, they are called to a close cooperation and solidarity in order to eliminate rivalry and groundless suspicion. The Church is convinced that in a truly pluralistic and democratic society there can be no conflict between freely professing one's religious faith in public and the obligation to promote the common good incumbent upon all citizens. This conviction also guides the Holy See's diplomatic activity within the international community.

Your Excellency, having touched upon some of the questions which at this time more directly involve Portugal and are closer to your Government's concern, I express my deepest hope that countries like yours will unite to find new, creative ways capable of offering in-depth solutions to the potential or actual situations of conflict, fostering the path of dialogue and negotiation as the only civilized way to resolve disputes, with respect for justice and solidarity between nations and their peoples. Based on its traditions and experience, the Portuguese nation could do much in fact to promote dialogue between Europe and North Africa, especially in the countries of the Maghreb region, and towards increasing understanding and mutual cooperation in this area.

I can assure you, Mr. Ambassador that, according to your own wishes, you can always find here among the various departments of the Holy See the understanding and support which can be useful to you in your mission and efforts for peace and fellowship within the concert of peoples. We all wish that our diplomatic relations may contribute to maintaining and concretely applying the fundamental principles of civilization and humanity of which the Catholic Church, I for her part, seeks to be the attentive guardian.

In conclusion, I want to express my ardent wishes for the success of your mission as Portugal's diplomatic representative. Upon Your Excellency I implore assistance from on high that you may be happy in this distinguished form of service to your people; I readily impart to you, your distinguished family and the beloved Portuguese nation my Apostolic Blessing.

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