



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II
TO THE NEW AMBASSADOR OF CANADA
TO THE HOLY SEE***

Thursday, 12 October 2000

Mr Ambassador,

1. I am particularly pleased to welcome you on the occasion of the presentation of the Letters accrediting you as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Canada to the Holy See.

I appreciate the respectful words you just spoke to me, Mr Ambassador, as you recalled a post you previously held in Rome at your embassy to Italy. I thank you for the messages you have conveyed to me from His Excellency the Governor General and the Prime Minister; I would be grateful if you would express my gratitude in return and my cordial wishes for their mission at the service of their fellow citizens. Permit me to recall here Mr Pierre Elliott Trudeau, who has just died. He served his country for many years and I would like to pay homage to his memory.

2. As you have just mentioned, I wanted the next *World Youth Day* to take place in Toronto, thereby offering to all the young people of the world, especially to those of the vast American continent, the opportunity for a new experience of faith and ecclesial encounter. I would like to thank the Canadian authorities and the local Church for the support they have given this proposal and for the warm reception of this invitation, a welcome that is part of your country's tradition and culture. The recent *World Youth Day* celebrated in Rome during this Jubilee Year, which you have just recalled in particularly touching words, is a pressing invitation to the Church and to national communities at all levels of society. Last August, in fact, today's young people expressed, more strongly than at the previous meetings, their desire to lead a good and happy life by turning to God and serving their neighbour.

This reminds us of the attention we must pay to youth, to their intellectual and professional

formation and, more generally, to their human, moral and spiritual education. It is especially important to teach them the value of life, of all life, from conception to its natural end, for life is God's gift and we are not its masters. Many technical procedures lead a large number of our contemporaries to think that what is scientifically feasible is also morally acceptable, especially regarding the techniques of human reproduction. Science, which is a valuable help, can never be the sole criterion of moral discernment merely because it opens up new possibilities, the power of man over man, and, in a certain way, a mastery of living things.

You also know the Holy See's concern and the Church's commitment in your country to pass on to young people the principles they need to lead a personal and social life based on essential values. It is important that a country's educational community as a whole be mobilized so that not only is knowledge transmitted to future generations through teaching and witness of life, but also appropriate behaviour and the values that make it possible to recognize the deep meaning of all life, as well as the principles needed for discernment, decision-making and concrete human action. In particular, it is essential to give individuals, young people and adults, the ability to judge the value of their decisions and personal actions, for they must take responsibility for them before those who may ask them to account for them in public life.

3. In this spirit, all the authorities concerned must aid and support the institutions and people involved in the educational system, while offering parents the possibility and means to choose places where they can have their children educated in a way that corresponds to what they are seeking; no one, in fact, can replace parental responsibility in this area, and the national community can only act in a subsidiary way. Consequently, this conjugal and family institution, as the basic cell and essential structure of society which no other structure can replace or enjoy an equal footing with, must be given a privileged place in political and economic decisions. Parents, father and mother, who are the first teachers of their children, fulfil a very important mission in their regard. It is they who are responsible for their spiritual, moral and civic education; to fulfil it properly, they must be fully recognized, supported and backed by their leaders. In the same way, religious groups, recognized by the legitimate authority, must be able to make their contribution to the educational system, in order to instil fundamental values and religious principles in young people whose parents so wish, while respecting freedom of conscience.

4. Canada is a large country and is made up of many different human groups which contribute to the nation's richness. It is important that all the cultures, some of which are among the oldest on the continent, be fully recognized and be able to play an active part in social life, with respect for their specific qualities and a natural concern for fairness and fraternal solidarity. Indeed, to respect these cultures, whose members are called to act in harmonious accord, is to further the development of individuals, understanding among all the country's constituents, social cohesion and the integration of the nation's vital forces so that everyone can work for the common good and the building of society. In particular, constant attention is required for all those in society who are becoming poorer and poorer and are excluded from the economic networks. In this same

perspective, your compatriots are called to show ever greater care in welcoming foreigners; I encourage them to work so that every person without home or land may, with the help of others, regain his full dignity and lead a life that corresponds to this dignity. Concern for immigrants, especially those who come from the poorest countries or regions where conflicts are occurring, is a requirement of national and international life. No one can leave his neighbour without help or a place to settle, so that he can eat, be clothed and educated, live on his land and have all he needs to lead a decent life.

5. From this standpoint, the year of the Great Jubilee is also a particularly fitting occasion for Christians and all people of good will to increase their solidarity with their brethren in the poorest countries; through significant efforts to reduce the international debt, wealthier States should also support the public life of these countries by sending them qualified people who can contribute their help, for a limited time and with profound pedagogical concern, to a better organization and sounder administration of political, economic and social life, while respecting the specific features of the nations concerned. I also appreciate your country's commitment to peace and the fight against anti-personnel landmines; these still claim too many victims throughout the world, especially among children, who will always remain physically marked by the irresponsible decisions of warring countries to attack indirectly the defenceless civilian populations. In this Jubilee Year, when Christ invites us to be more and more responsible for one another, I once again appeal to the international community to do its utmost, wherever it may be necessary, to remove these fearful weapons as soon as possible from the areas where they are buried and to put a total halt to their manufacture.

Human beings are the world's greatest wealth, and to attack even one of them threatens all humanity.

6. Your presence at the Vatican gives me an opportunity to extend a cordial greeting to the Bishops and to all the Catholic faithful of Canada. I encourage them to live their Christian life faithfully with their pastors. In this way they will find the strength to bear renewed witness among their compatriots, by their words, their actions, their faith and the Gospel values by which they live. You know, Mr Ambassador, of the Church's long experience, especially in the areas of education, the family, health and charitable activity. In Canada, as throughout the American continent, the faithful work continually with their brethren, and the Catholic Church intends to participate fully in national life, in a spirit of dialogue and cooperation with all people of good will and in her own specific role.

As you begin your mission as Canada's representative to the Apostolic See, I offer you my best wishes. I can assure you that those who work with me will always give you a warm welcome and the attentive understanding you may need to fulfil the mission entrusted to you.

Through you, Mr Ambassador, I cordially greet His Excellency the Governor General, the Prime

Minister, all the authorities and the entire Canadian people, as I extend my best wishes for happiness and prosperity to everyone.

I ask God to grant his blessings to you and your loved ones, to the embassy staff and to all your compatriots.

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