



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO H.E. MR JOÃO ALBERTO BACELAR DA ROCHA PÁRIS
AMBASSADOR OF PORTUGAL TO THE HOLY SEE***

Tuesday, 21 September 2004

Mr Ambassador,

Welcome to the Vatican, where I have the pleasure of receiving you on the occasion of the presentation of the Letters accrediting you as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Portuguese Republic to the Holy See. I thank you for the greetings you have conveyed to me from President Jorge Sampaio and from the Portuguese People; his words reminded me of the days of my Pastoral Visits to your Country, especially at the Shrine of Fatima, when I was able to see for myself the Christian roots of this Nation, blessed and protected by Our Lady. I would be most grateful, Your Excellency, if you would kindly express to the President of the Republic my best wishes for the well-being and prosperity of the entire Country, and the assurance of my prayers to the Most High that he will continue to inspire the sentiments of reciprocal understanding and brotherhood that will make it possible for all to contribute to building the common homeland.

Everyone is familiar with the social and political world scene at the beginning of this millennium: the accentuation of regional differences, both cultural and economic; the concern to safeguard peace in the face of the escalation of extremist groups which "have in turn put even greater obstacles in the way of dialogue and negotiation" (*Message for the World Day of Peace 2004*, n. 8); the frequency of natural disasters and others which are far more serious and devastate entire populations, such as famine and the endemic diseases that sometimes escape all control; the glaring gap between rich and poor and the consequent disregard for human rights which are, among other things, cause for grave apprehension to any government leader conscious of the far reaching effect of his own decisions.

Mr Ambassador, your Country is aware of the Holy See's efforts to humanize globalization and to

profit from the beneficial influence of scientific and technological progress with a view to the greater well-being of every people or nation. For this reason, the Authorities of the Portuguese Government did not hesitate to recognize and proclaim their own Christian convictions at the moment of their collaboration in drafting the European Constitution. I would like to make the most of this opportunity to express my gratitude for your Government's action in bringing the Christian identity of Europe to the fore, and I hope that the convictions that derive from it will be asserted in both national and international contexts.

In this regard, the signing of the new Concordat between the Holy See and Portugal confirms the living expression of a mature agreement to reinforce the presence of this Christian "soul" founded in the "deep historical relations between the Catholic Church and Portugal, taking into account the mutual responsibilities that impel both States, in the area of religious freedom, to continue their service to the common good and to collaborate in building a society that promotes the dignity of the human person, justice and peace" (Cf. *Preamble*, 18 May 2004). May Providence, as of old, make us relive the past with new and daring gestures, by striking the hour of a new evangelization that it is up to us all to discover. My wishes are for a Portugal that is active and fearless, ever open to the new challenges of our society and aware that the Almighty will not leave empty-handed those who strive to trust in his plans.

Moreover, the new challenges could be better evaluated if presented to public opinion by the International Community as part of a logical development whose driving force was constituted by the local society's own vitality: associating the citizens with social projects, giving them confidence in those who govern them and in the Nation to which they belong; it is on these foundations that the harmonious life of human societies is built. Faithful to her religious and humanitarian mission, the Church seeks to fulfil her role as a leaven of unity and would like the Gospel to make ever more fertile the seed of culture that has formed a nation.

I know that the Catholic Pastors and faithful of your Motherland, the cradle of many Portuguese Saints and Blesseds, are devoted to this task, Mr Ambassador, as you, moreover, have recognized, emphasizing the service to the faith of this generous and faithful people. I make the most of this opportunity, Your Excellency, to convey through you my fraternal greetings to all your compatriots, members of the Catholic Church, whose heartfelt aspiration is to cooperate harmoniously and effectively with their fellow citizens in building a supportive and fraternal Nation.

Mr Ambassador, at this moment when your mandate is officially beginning, I offer you my best wishes for the success of your noble mission. I assure you that the concern and attention of my collaborators is at your disposal in all that may contribute to the fruitful fulfilment of your office.

Lastly, as I reaffirm all my affection for the People of Portugal and my respectful greeting to their Leaders, I invoke upon you, Your Excellency, upon your relatives and all those who work with you as well as on the whole Nation, the help of God and an abundance of his Blessings.

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