



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

TO H.E. Mr TERENCE BARRY MCCARTHY,

THE NEW AMBASSADOR OF AUSTRALIA TO THE HOLY SEE*

Monday, 2 December 1991 Mr Ambassador, I am pleased to welcome you to the Vatican and to accept the Letters of Credence by which the Governor-General of Australia has appointed you Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary to the Holy See. I take this occasion to renew the expression of my respect and warm affection for the Australian people, and I ask you to convey to the Governor-General, the Prime Minister and all your fellow citizens my prayerful good wishes for their peace and prosperity. Your visit today brings to mind memories of my Pastoral Visit to your nation in 1986. I recall with deep gratitude the cordial welcome accorded to me when, as a "friend to all Australians", I came "to bear witness . . . to the greatness of (their) mission and to (their) immense capacity for good" (John Paul II, *Address at the Airport of Fairbairn, Australia*, 1 [4 Nov. 1986]). It is my hope that your service as your country's representative will strengthen the bonds of friendship and cooperation which have characterized relations between Australia and the Holy See both before and after our first exchange of diplomatic representatives, so that by working together the Church and civil society may achieve the ends proper to each. The Australian people and their Government are well known for their commitment to preserving and strengthening a social order which respects and guarantees human rights, one of the most basic of which is the right to religious liberty (cf. *Dignitatis Humanae*, 2; John Paul II, *Message for the World Day of Peace 1991*). One cannot help thinking that the bitter experiences of many of the first settlers in your country have made all the more keen its citizens' appreciation for these inalienable human goods. This atmosphere of ordered freedom has provided an auspicious context in which the Catholic Church has been able to pursue with due liberty the mission entrusted to her by her Divine Founder. The Catholics of Australia have used their liberty to build schools, hospitals and other health-care facilities and to establish centres for social service, all for the glory of God and love of neighbour. These works serve to reinforce the respect for human dignity which is the basis of all peace and prosperity in society. The Church is thankful that Australian society gives due recognition to her contribution and that her works are actively fostered and supported. I am confident that the preservation and strengthening of these good relations between Church and State will in the years ahead be of utmost importance in pursuing the common good, which, in the words of the Second Vatican Council, "embraces the sum of those conditions of social life by which individuals, families and groups can achieve their own fulfilment in a relatively thorough and ready way" (*Gaudium et Spes*, 70). Mr Ambassador, you have mentioned a number of areas in which your country and the Holy See have common concerns. Among these the efforts to reduce the level of armaments and the threat of war throughout the world deserve to be especially highlighted. Your nation's earnest pursuit of these objectives is in harmony with its democratic character, for a society which takes as its first and guiding principle the ineradicable dignity of all men and women will never rest content with establishing the security of its own members alone. How could it be otherwise? For if all men are of equal dignity by nature and not by virtue of their status, even the status of their

citizenship, the tragedies of war - that terrible scourge against the dignity of man - will call forth the most vigorous response to banish this evil wherever it threatens, whether near at hand or far away. For its part the Holy See, in obedience to its mandate from the Prince of Peace, is devoted to doing everything possible to assist the nations of the world in hastening the day when war is no longer used, even as a last resort, for the resolution of conflicting claims. Peace is effectively pursued by remedying the unjust situations which can impel communities to violence, by habituating ourselves and the younger generations to act justly and to recognize our happiness in this and not in unbridled material gain, by timely collective action to thwart the schemes of the wicked, and by developing economic and social life of those peoples whose diminished share in the goods of the world could cause them in their discontent to take up arms. With particular urgency efforts for development must be directed to the nations of the "South", so called because it is in that hemisphere that the greater concentration of economically underdeveloped countries is perceived to lie. In this regard the Commonwealth of Australia, with its well-developed economy and its mastery of the technology needed for the production of wealth, is particularly well-placed to be of assistance to others. In regional proximity to some of the world's poorest nations, your country has a particular opportunity to give a lead in securing peace by cooperating with its neighbours in their own development and by enlisting in this task the other economically advanced nations whose friendship and shared traditions dispose them to a similar solidarity. For what it has already done in this sphere Australia is to be praised. For what it is yet called to do, we can be sure that God will strengthen it to respond generously. The dramatic events in Central and Eastern Europe over the last two years have given to peoples all over the world a renewed confidence in the power of united action for throwing off oppression and establishing a constitutional order in harmony with the order of true justice. However, this impressive reassertion of human dignity, acclaimed in so many quarters, brings us face to face with this paradox: at the very moment when the demands for fundamental human rights seem to be receiving ever wider recognition, the most basic of natural rights, namely the right to life and the value of life, are increasingly threatened, and this often in the very societies which view themselves as defenders of the cause of justice. The right to life is based upon the natural order. It is not the product of any political ordinance. The mission of every government by nature is to defend this right (cf. John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, 40). When a society loses sight of the transcendent worth of the life of every human person, it lapses into measuring the value of each life according to merely utilitarian criteria so that government is no longer the guardian of life but the arbiter of its public usefulness. The enactment of laws permitting or encouraging abortion, euthanasia or any other attack upon life is a sign that a community has become a society of death and is passing into decay. All the leaders of nations dedicated to respect for human rights - whether they come from countries, such as yours, where this is a longstanding tradition or from societies where it is a newly discovered value - can be true to this conviction only to the degree that they respect the human person at every stage of life. Catholics in Australia, as in every nation in which they make their home, are eager to act upon this truth, to work with their fellow citizens in order to transform their society into one which is fully dedicated to respect for human dignity and life. Mr Ambassador, I renew the expression of my hope that your service as Australia's Representative will foster the cooperation of your nation and the Holy See in working for a civilization truly worthy of the human person. I assure you that all the departments of the Roman Curia will assist you in the discharge of the responsibilities entrusted to you by your Government. I pray that in his loving kindness Almighty God will be your strength, and I invoke his abundant blessings upon you and your family and upon your country and her people.

*AAS 84 (1992), p.1151-1154. *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, vol. XIV, 2 pp. 1303-1306. *L'Attività della Santa Sede* 1991 pp. 1012-1015. *L'Osservatore Romano* 3.12.1991 p.8. *L'Osservatore Romano. Weekly edition in English* n.49 p.4. © Copyright 1991 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana

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