



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO H.E. MR GEOFFREY KENYON WARD,
AMBASSADOR OF NEW ZEALAND TO THE HOLY SEE****

Thursday, 16 June 2005

Your Excellency,

I am pleased to welcome you today and to accept the Letters of Credence by which you are appointed Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of New Zealand to the Holy See. I thank you for the gracious words of greeting and I would ask you to convey to the Government and people of New Zealand my sincere best wishes and the assurance of my prayers for the well-being of the nation.

The people of your country, I know, are very conscious of the duty to promote peace and solidarity in our world. Last year your Prime Minister, accompanied by a group of veterans, visited the historic site of Monte Cassino to honour the countless young men who courageously sacrificed their lives to defend fundamental universal values being threatened by false nationalist ideologies. Still today, this readiness to protect and promote the values of justice and peace, which transcend cultural or national boundaries, is a well-recognized and laudable trait of your people. Tangible expressions of this are found in your nation's participation in aid projects and peace-keeping operations extending from the Solomon Islands to Afghanistan and the Middle East, as well as the willingness to champion the causes of sustainable development and environmental protection. At its most significant level, this generosity elicits a recognition of the essential nature of human life as a gift and of our world as a family of persons.

The desire to uphold the common good is founded on the belief that man comes into the world as a gift of the Creator. It is from God that all men and women - made in his image - receive their common inviolable dignity and their summons to responsibility. Today, when individuals often forget their origin and thus lose sight of their goal, they easily fall prey to whimsical social trends,

the distortion of reason by particular interest groups, and exaggerated individualism. Confronted with this “crisis of meaning” (cf. Encyclical Letter *Fides et Ratio*, 81), civic and religious authorities are called to work together encouraging everyone, including the young, to “direct their steps towards a truth which transcends them” (*ibid.*, 5). Sundered from that universal truth, which is the only guarantee of freedom and happiness, individuals are at the mercy of caprice and slowly lose the capacity to discover the profoundly satisfying meaning of human life.

New Zealanders traditionally have recognized and celebrated the place of marriage and stable domestic life at the heart of their society and indeed continue to expect social and political forces to support families and to protect the dignity of women, especially the most vulnerable. They appreciate that secular distortions of marriage can never overshadow the splendour of a life-long covenant based on generous self-giving and unconditional love. Correct reason tells them that “the future of humanity passes by way of the family” (Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*, 86) which offers society a secure foundation for its aspirations. I therefore encourage the people of Aotearoa, through you Mr Ambassador, to continue to take up the challenge of forging a pattern of life, both individually and as a community, in relation to God’s plan for all humanity.

The disquieting process of secularization is occurring in many parts of the world. Where the Christian foundations of society risk being forgotten, the task of preserving the transcendent dimension present in every culture and of strengthening the authentic exercise of individual freedom against relativism becomes increasingly difficult. Such a predicament calls for both Church and civil leaders to ensure that the question of morality is given ample discussion in the public forum. In this regard, there is a great need today to recover a vision of the mutual relationship between civil law and moral law which, as well as being proposed by the Christian tradition, is also part of the patrimony of the great juridical traditions of humanity (cf. Encyclical Letter *Evangelium Vitae*, 71). Only in this way can the multiple claims to ‘rights’ be linked to truth and the nature of authentic freedom be correctly understood in relation to that truth which sets its limits and reveals its goals.

For her part the Catholic Church in New Zealand continues to do all she can to uphold the Christian foundations of civic life. She is much involved in the spiritual and intellectual formation of the young, especially through her schools. Additionally her charitable apostolate extends to those living on the margins of society and I am confident that, through her mission of service, she will respond generously to new social challenges as they arise.

Your Excellency, I know that your appointment will serve to strengthen further the bonds of friendship which already exist between New Zealand and the Holy See. As you take up your new responsibilities I assure you that the various offices of the Roman Curia are ready to assist you in the fulfilment of your duties. Upon you, your family and your fellow citizens, I cordially invoke the abundant blessings of Almighty God.

**L'Osservatore Romano* 17.6.2005 p.4, 8.

Insegnamenti di Benedetto XVI vol. I p.231-233.

L'Osservatore Romano. Weekly Edition in English n. 25 p. 4.

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