



## The Holy See

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**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI  
TO THE BISHOPS OF THE BRAZILIAN EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE  
(NORTH EAST III REGION) ON THEIR "AD LIMINA" VISITA**

Hall of the Swiss, Papal Summer Residence, Castel Gandolfo  
Friday, 10 September 2010

*Your Eminence,  
Dear Archbishops and Bishops of Brazil,*

I warmly greet all of you on the occasion of your *ad limina* visit to Rome to which you have come to strengthen your bonds of fraternal communion with the Successor of Peter and to be encouraged by him in your guidance of Christ's flock. I thank Bishop Czesław Stanula of Itabuna for his cordial words on your behalf and I assure you of my prayers for your intentions and for the beloved people of the north-east, from your North East III Region.

More than five centuries ago the first Mass in Brazil was celebrated in your very Region. It made the Body and Blood of Christ really present for the sanctification of the men and women of this beloved nation that came into being under the auspices of the Holy Cross. It was the first time that Christ's Gospel was proclaimed to this people, illuminating its daily life. Such evangelizing action of the Catholic Church was and continues to be fundamental in forging the identity of the Brazilian People, marked by the harmonious coexistence of individuals from different regions and cultures. Nevertheless, although the values of the Catholic faith have shaped the Brazilian heart and spirit, we note the growing influence of new elements in society, which a few decades ago were almost unknown to it. They are leading to the steady abandonment of ecclesial life, and also of the Church, by many Catholics, while the rapid expansion of Evangelical and Neo-Pentecostal communities is evident in the religious panorama of Brazil.

In a certain sense the reasons at the root of these groups' success are a sign of your people's widespread thirst for God. This is also an indicator of evangelization at a personal level, which is at times superficial; in fact, baptized people insufficiently evangelized can easily be swayed because

their faith is frail; it is all too often based on an ingenuous form of devotion whereas, as I have said, they retain an innate religious sense. In the face of this situation a clear need for the Catholic Church in Brazil is emerging. On the one hand she must commit herself to a new evangelization that spares no effort in seeking Catholics who have drifted away or of those who know little or nothing of the Gospel message, but brings them to a personal encounter with Jesus Christ, living and active in his Church. On the other hand, with the growth of new groups that in spite of being divided into various communities and denominations claim to be followers of Christ, it is even more imperative for Catholic pastors to commit themselves to building bridges to establish contact through a healthy ecumenical dialogue in the truth.

This effort is necessary first of all because division among Christians is contrary to the will of the Lord that "all may be one" (Jn 17: 21). Furthermore, the lack of unity is a cause of scandal and ends by undermining the credibility of the Christian message proclaimed in society. Moreover its proclamation is perhaps even more necessary today than in past decades because, as your reports clearly demonstrate, the negative influence of intellectual and moral relativism in peoples' lives is evident, even in the small towns in the interior of Brazil.

Numerous obstacles stand in the way of Christian unity. In the first place it is essential to reject an erroneous vision of ecumenism that is conducive to a certain doctrinal indifferentism that seeks with a-critical irenics to level out all "opinions" in a sort of ecclesiological relativism. On a par with this is the challenge of the constant rise of new Christian groups, some of which resort to aggressive proselytism, which shows that the scene of ecumenism is still very variegated and confused. In this context as [I said in 2007 in the Cathedral da Sé in São Paulo](#), at the unforgettable meeting with you Brazilian Bishops "a good historical and doctrinal formation is absolutely essential, so as to foster necessary discernment that leads to a better understanding of the specific identity of each of these communities, of the elements that divide them, and elements can be helpful on the road to building greater unity. The greatest common ground for collaboration should be the defence of fundamental moral values transmitted by the biblical tradition against the relativistic and consumerist cultural forces that seek to destroy them. Another such area is faith in God the Creator and in Jesus Christ his incarnate Son" (n. 6). I therefore encourage you to continue taking positive steps in this direction. One such is dialogue with the churches and ecclesial communities that belong to the National Council of Christian Churches, which, with initiatives like the Ecumenical Brotherhood Campaign, contribute to promoting Gospel values in Brazilian society.

Esteemed Brothers, dialogue among Christians is an imperative in our day and an irreversible option of the Church. In the meantime, as the Second Vatican Council recalled, prayer, conversion and the sanctification of life must be at the heart of every effort to promote unity (cf. [Unitatis Redintegratio](#), n. 8). It is the Lord who gives unity, it is not something created by human beings; Pastors are duty bound to obey the Lord's will, promoting practical initiatives that are free from any kind of conformist reductionism. However, they must be carried out with sincerity and realism and

with the patience and perseverance born from faith in the providential action of the Holy Spirit.

Dear and venerable Brothers, at this meeting I have sought to highlight briefly several aspects of the great challenge of ecumenism entrusted to your apostolic concern. As I take my leave of you, I express once again my esteem and the assurance of my prayers for all of you and for your dioceses. I would like here in a special way to renew my fatherly solidarity to the faithful of the Diocese of Barreiras, recently deprived of the guidance of their first zealous Pastor, Bishop Ricardo José Weberberger, who is now in the Father's house, our common destination. May he rest in peace! As I invoke the intercession of Nossa Senhora Aparecida, I impart to each one of you, to the priests, the men and women religious, the seminarians, the catechists and all the people entrusted to your care, an affectionate Apostolic Blessing.

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