



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO H.E. Mr. RAYMOND L. FLYNN
AMBASSADOR OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
TO THE HOLY SEE***

Thursday, 2 September 1993

Mr Ambassador,

I am pleased to welcome you to the Vatican and to accept the Letters of Credence appointing you as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the United States of America. With great pleasure I recall my recent visit to your country on the occasion of the celebration of the "Eighth World Youth Day". In Denver I was able to listen to the hopes and concerns of America's young people and to see in their vitality and idealism a tremendous resource for your nation's future. The sight of so many young people gathered from countries throughout the world was also a vivid reminder of the grave responsibility of international leaders to ensure that the next generation has every opportunity to contribute its gifts to building ever more just and harmonious relations among all the members of the human family.

In your address, Mr Ambassador, you referred to many of the urgent and unresolved issues confronting the international community today. Many of these issues have become even more pressing as a result of the dramatic changes in the world situation in recent years. Tragically, the fall of the walls which separated East and West into two camps has made more evident the scandalous walls of poverty, violence and political oppression which still divide vast sectors of humanity. The new era now opening before us calls for *a renewed sense of collective moral responsibility* in the work of promoting an integral human development, safeguarding human rights and freedom, encouraging more participatory forms of government, and establishing effective structures for the equitable solution of disagreements between nations and different ethnic and social groups.

These challenges have a fundamental moral dimension, and they demand a response which is capable of transcending narrow self-interest or mere strategic calculations. As I had occasion to observe in the Encyclical "[Centesimus Annus](#)", "the world today is ever more aware that solving serious national and international problems is not just a matter of economic production or of juridical or social organization, but also calls for specific ethical and religious values, as well as changes of mentality, behaviour and structures" (John Paul II, [Centesimus Annus](#), 60). *New forms of solidarity and practical cooperation between nations* are essential for finding effective means for putting an end to situations of injustice and to acts of violence which threaten human dignity and violate human rights. Because of its great influence in the international community, the United States has a significant role to play in this process, and I am confident that your countrymen will seek to respond to the challenges of the present with the strong sense of purpose which has so often distinguished them in the past.

Of particular importance in this regard is the responsible exercise of freedom by peoples only recently liberated from various forms of political oppression. Because of its long tradition of respect for freedom and its readiness to preserve it at great sacrifice, the United States of America has inspired the efforts of many developing countries to build a stable democratic life. *Authentic freedom however always demands an honest relationship with regard to truth* (Cf. John Paul II, [Redemptor Hominis](#), 12); it is only by accepting the truth that freedom is fully attained (Cf. Jn. 8, 32). The search for freedom can never be detached from respect for the truth about man and his true identity, for then the ideal of freedom easily becomes empty and superficial, and can even be used as the pretext for forms of self-aggrandizement, oppression and violence. Indeed, "if there is no ultimate truth to guide and direct political activity, then ideas and convictions can easily be manipulated for reasons of power. As history demonstrates, a democracy without values easily turns into open or thinly disguised totalitarianism" (John Paul II, [Centesimus Annus](#), 46).

The moral strength of any democracy will depend on its ability to protect freedom while at the same time providing it with necessary ethical foundations. It is precisely in this important task of discerning the moral requirements of a just social order that Christians feel obligated to offer their proper contribution to national life, together with all people of good will. Concern for the common good has been the driving force behind the notable involvement of America's Catholics in the life of their nation. That concern has found concrete expression in the network of schools, hospitals and social services with which the Church has traditionally sought to train responsible citizens and to assist the poor and needy. Today, as ever, *Catholics rightly expect that their voices will be heard in debates regarding the issues facing American society*. They understand that these issues should be decided not simply by the balancing of particular interests on the basis of the political power of contending groups, but rather on the assessment and integration of those interests within the framework of a coherent vision of the common good, inspired by criteria of justice and morality.

It was precisely the need for such a responsible moral vision that I pointed to in Denver when I expressed my conviction that "the American people possess the intelligence and will to meet the

challenge of rededicating themselves with renewed vigor to fostering the truths on which this country was founded and by which it grew" (John Paul II, *Address at Stapleton Airport in Denver*, 3, 12 August 1993). Primary among these is respect for the right to life, the first of those inalienable rights with which all have been endowed by the Creator.

Mr Ambassador, in your presence today I willingly repeat the words I addressed to your fellow Americans in Denver: "The bounty and providence of God have laid an enormous responsibility on the people and Government of the United States. But that burden is also the opportunity for true greatness. Together with millions of people around the globe I share the profound hope that in the present international situation the United States will spare no effort in advancing authentic freedom and in fostering human rights and solidarity" (Ibid.). I am pleased to assure you of my prayers for the American people and my trust that Almighty God will guide your nation in the ways of authentic peace, with liberty and justice for all. As you begin your mission, I offer you my cordial good wishes and I assure you of the ready cooperation of the offices of the Holy See. Upon you and your family I cordially invoke God's abundant blessings.

**Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, vol. XVI, 2 p. 596-599.

L'Attività della Santa Sede 1993 p. 703-705.

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