



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE ARGENTINA REPUBLIC*

Thursday, 5 April 2001

1. Mr President, I am very pleased to welcome you at this meeting and to extend my most cordial greeting to you as President of the Argentine Republic, which I always keep in my heart, in my mind and in my prayers. I also greet those who accompany you: your esteemed wife, the Foreign Minister and the distinguished members of your delegation. And from here I would like to extend my loving thoughts to all the sons and daughters of your noble country, from Quiaca to Tierra del Fuego.

I am most grateful for your kind words expressing the respect and affection of all Argentinians and explaining to me the resolutions that motivate your Government's action at the dawn of the third millennium of the Christian age, when Argentina is preparing to celebrate the second centenary of its independence. In this regard, I would like to recall that the Catholic Church's presence has constantly accompanied Argentinians on their way, encouraging them by preaching God's word and by spreading the Christian values, which today constitute a part of the nation's spiritual heritage.

2. Your visit to the See of the Successor of the Apostle St Peter is taking place several months after the end of the Great Jubilee, in which we celebrated the 2,000th anniversary of the Incarnation of the Son of God, the central event of history, which the Church proclaims as the moment of the fullness of time (cf. Gal 4: 4). This celebration is an important moment of special intensity for the whole Church and now, gazing at Christ's face, stirred by his words, "*duc in altum put out into the deep*" (Lk 5: 4), she is preparing to face the challenges of the present time confidently, thereby illuminating the decisions that are being taken for the suitable progress and good of humanity.

Your country actively participated in the events of the Great Jubilee in the various Dioceses and in

the different meetings that took place in Rome. In this regard how can we forget the various local initiatives, especially the celebration of the Eucharistic Congress in Córdoba, at which the Bishops also wanted to make a contribution to national reconciliation, as you yourself mentioned. With regard to the celebrations in Rome, I am sure that the very numerous Argentine young people who took part in World Youth Day last August will be able to communicate and bear witness among their peers to the special religious experience lived in communion with young people from all over the world. Likewise, the remarkable number of participants from your country in the Jubilee of Government Leaders, Members of Parliament and Politicians makes us hope in their willingness to carry out their public role in accordance with Christian principles and as a true service to all the classes of Argentine society. For all of this, I would like to express my gratitude for the work carried out by the Pastors of this beloved nation, in which various authorities have collaborated including the Parliament itself.

3. Your country, Mr President, has deep Catholic roots, and has therefore always looked to the Church and this Apostolic See as a reference-point for its own identity and history. When the first voices claiming freedom and independence were raised on Argentine soil, the parliamentary leaders of the homeland did not forget the reference to God in the new Republic, and the invocation of his Holy Name as a source of all reason and justice was later written into the preamble of the Constitution. It was Belgrano who suggested the national emblem with the colours of the Immaculate Virgin, blue and white, and so today, under this emblem, all Argentines feel protected.

Consequently, Christian values are present in the culture, history and certain declarations of your country's legislation. People with very different backgrounds or beliefs adhered to these principles throughout the almost two centuries of its existence as a nation, and found in their new homeland effective respect for every ethnic or religious minority, in accordance with the constitutional declaration which opens the doors of the country "to all the people in the world who wish to live in the land of Argentina".

4. The Holy See has followed Argentina's various historical events with special attention. It is appropriate here to mention some which are very significant and remain deeply impressed upon the memory of the Argentine people. Such was the visit to the federal capital of then-Cardinal Eugenio Pacelli, later Pope Pius XII, as Papal Legate to the 32nd International Eucharistic Congress in Buenos Aires, which left an indelible mark on your nation's Church, giving a strong impulse of renewal to the growing presence of lay people in the Church and in society.

I would also like to recall my two pastoral visits to your country, where I experienced the Argentinians' warm welcome and affection. It was in June 1982 when I felt very hard-pressed because of certain dramatic circumstances in your nation. With my presence I wanted to encourage, in the light of the Gospel and Catholic social teaching, understanding and harmony among peoples, advocating the irreplaceable good of peace in the face of extremely dangerous international risks.

Moreover, the cause of peace and understanding among peoples led me to agree to mediate between your country and her sister Republic of Chile, also on the brink of war as a result of the controversy that had come to a head in the Beagle Canal region. Thanks be to God reason and the spirit of harmony prevailed, so the catastrophe of a war with unforeseeable consequences was avoided by the signing of the Treaty of Peace and Friendship on 29 November 1984. This enabled what might have been a scenario of war to be transformed into an area of collaboration, of reciprocal friendly visits and plans for development.

5. The Catholic Church, over and above the changing political situation and circumstances, would like to promote the integral good of citizens, despite the international conditions and complex domestic situations which are very strongly felt at this time. A considerable part of the population is experiencing the grave consequences that mainly affect the neediest social classes. Unemployment obliges individuals, families or social groups to consider emigration in order to seek a better setting for their life.

6. Confronted by this situation, your Government is aware that it is urgently necessary to take steps to create a climate of social equality, which will encourage better participation and greater justice in the distribution of the important resources on which your country relies. Only in this way will it be possible to achieve a situation of peace through justice that is based on a communal effort and an economy at the service of the human being. Thus the country will be able to contribute to making reality, in the Latin American and global context, the order of common values of which San Martín and Bolívar dreamed, encouraging the integral promotion and legitimate interests of the peoples in the area.

The Bishops of Argentina, aware of this problem, reaffirm the principles of Catholic social teaching over and above the political changes. I trust that their voices will be re-echoed by public leaders, making these principles a social reality in order to avoid the kinds of behaviour that breed corruption, poverty and all the other forms of social violence that derive from the lack of solidarity. The great moral reserves of the Argentine people guarantee the future with a well-founded hope.

7. This same people have given proof of their attachment to important values such as honesty, justice, respect for life from its conception to natural death. Argentina has sustained these values in various forums for discussion, including international ones. Faced with an increasingly widespread conception that frequently favours selfish attitudes, with little respect for the principles that protect the first and fundamental human right, the right to life, the clear-sighted and humanist vision of sovereign countries such as yours, which set an example of positions in harmony with the natural law, deserves recognition.

It is known that progress cannot be made by denying the fundamental human and moral values nor by favouring means that can threaten public morality, which will lead to negative consequences, not only in the ethical context but also to the detriment of society itself. It is

impossible to remain indifferent to these situations which threaten the defence of the family, the basic cell of society which comes before the State, and which, as you recalled in your words, is the true school of the richest humanism, which forges men and women capable of embodying the most genuine virtues.

8. Mr President, at the end of our meeting I would like to express my best wishes to you and your family, to your collaborators in the Government and to the entire beloved Argentine people. I ask God that the noble Argentine nation may quickly overcome the difficulties of the present time and embark upon a new season of peace, prosperity and integral progress, in which each citizen can live with dignity and serenity in his own land. With special affection I entrust to God, Father of us all, those who have suffered and are suffering from the wounds of a painful past. I lovingly invoke the Lord's peace upon the deceased and the grace of national reconciliation.

May Our Lady of Luján, patroness of Argentina, protect all her children so that they may return enthusiastically to the path of progress founded on generous effort, enlivened by the hope of a promising future. I therefore cordially impart a special Apostolic Blessing to you, Mr President, and to all your compatriots.

**L'Osservatore Romano. Weekly Edition in English n.16 p.6.*

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