



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO H.E. MR DONALD SMITH
AMBASSADOR OF CANADA TO THE HOLY SEE***

Saturday, 4 September 2004

Your Excellency,

It is a pleasure for me to extend a cordial welcome to you today as I accept the Letters of Credence by which you are appointed Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Canada to the Holy See. My pastoral visits to your country, especially the joyous occasion of [World Youth Day 2002 in Toronto](#), remain clearly etched in my mind. I thank you for the greetings which you bear from the Governor-General and the people of Canada. Please convey to them my heartfelt thanks and assure them of my prayers for the well-being of the nation. Canada's generous and practical contributions to the building of a world of peace, justice and prosperity are widely recognized by the international community. Indeed, solidarity with developing nations is a well-known and laudable trait of your people, evidenced, among other things, by your nation's notable involvement in peace-keeping missions and the production of low-cost medicines for poorer nations. In the face of the suffering and divisions which so often afflict the human family, the need to find lasting solutions to human conflicts becomes all the more apparent. In this regard, as Your Excellency observed, during thirty-five years of diplomatic relations the Holy See has worked together with Canada on a number of projects for the betterment of disadvantaged people and communities, including the promotion and application of the Ottawa Convention on landmines and the WTO agreement on intellectual property and public health. Similarly, with other countries, Canada and the Holy See have endeavoured to bring stability, peace and development to the Great Lakes Region in Africa. Such gestures of solidarity are more than just unilateral acts of good intent. Rather, they spring from values and convictions which have shaped Canadian society throughout its history and upon which all authentic social progress depends. For this reason, during my last visit to your country I encouraged all Canadians to treasure the core of their heritage: the spiritual vision of life inspired by the belief that all men and women receive their essential dignity from God and with it the capacity to grow towards truth and goodness ([Homily of Concluding Mass, Toronto, 28 July 2002](#)). Your Excellency has noted that Canada's openness to migration has brought increasing diversity and a great richness to your culture, fostering mutual accommodation and respect between ethnic groups. The characteristics of tolerance and hospitality have endeared many to your land. With the successful integration of the multiple ethnic communities now found in your country, they also illustrate for other nations that the respect due to every person is rooted in the common origin of all men and women, rather than in the fact of differences between peoples. It is this sublime and fundamental truth concerning the human

person – created male and female in the image and likeness of God (cf. *Gn 1:26-27*) – which constitutes the immutable basis for all other anthropological truths. From its nature as divine gift stems the inviolable and sacred dignity of all life, the respect owed to every individual, and the requirement that men and women adhere to the natural and moral structure with which they have been endowed by God (cf. *Centesimus Annus*, 38). For generations Canadians have recognized and celebrated the place of marriage at the heart of your society. Established by the Creator with its own nature and purpose, and preserved in natural moral law, the institution of marriage necessarily entails the complementarity of husbands and wives who participate in God's creative activity through the raising of children. Spouses thereby ensure the survival of society and culture, and rightly deserve specific and categorical legal recognition by the State. Any attempts to change the meaning of the word "spouse" contradict right reason: legal guarantees, analogous to those granted to marriage, cannot be applied to unions between persons of the same sex without creating a false understanding of the nature of marriage. Mr Ambassador, Canada is not alone in the difficult challenges facing individuals in contemporary culture. With goodwill, I am confident that the splendid vision of supportive and stable family life, so dear to the people of Canada, will continue to offer to society the foundation upon which the aspirations of your nation can be built. For her part the Catholic Church in Canada is willing to offer assistance in upholding the essential social foundations of civic life. She is heavily involved in the spiritual and intellectual formation of the young, especially through her schools, and her social apostolate extends to those facing some of the serious problems of modern society including alcohol and drug abuse as well as various forms of social displacement. I am confident that the Catholic community will respond generously to new social challenges as they arise. Your Excellency, I know that your mission will serve to strengthen further the bonds of friendship which already exist between Canada 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 fellow citizens, I cordially invoke the abundant blessings of Almighty

God.

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