



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE NEW AMBASSADOR
OF THE REPUBLIC OF HAITI TO THE HOLY SEE****

Friday, 22 November 2002

Mr Ambassador,

1. It is a pleasure for me to welcome Your Excellency, on the occasion of the presentation of the Letters accrediting you as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Haiti to the Holy See.

I thank you for your kind words, and for the greetings you have conveyed to me from the President of the Republic, H.E. Mr Jean-Bertrand Aristide. I would be most grateful if you would kindly give him in return my best wishes for the fulfillment of his high responsibility in the service of the nation. Through you, I would also like to greet with affection the entire people of Haiti, who are dear to me.

2. Mr Ambassador, I appreciated the decision taken by the highest authorities of the State to designate a resident ambassador once again, and in your person. This desire shows the concern of the Haitian State to develop increasingly the relations of friendship and understanding it already has with the Holy See, in order to support all Haitians in their efforts to take an ever more active part in the human and spiritual advancement of their country.

3. You have just recalled the forthcoming bicentenary of the Independence of your nation that will be celebrated in 2004. You also mentioned the deep crisis affecting your country, which you describe as a crisis of values and of society. I earnestly hope that the anniversary of this event, of which the Haitian people are so proud since Haiti was the first country in the whole of Latin America and the Caribbean to proclaim its independence, may be a privileged opportunity to deepen the ability to "co-exist" together. This requires social choices based on human, moral and spiritual values. Likewise, it is important to take into account the just aspirations of the population

to respect for individuals, for peace, security, justice and equity. The vast majority of the inhabitants suffer from an ever more intolerable poverty, which drives many of your compatriots to emigrate or to leave the rural environment to take refuge in the large cities. This savage urbanization which spawns cultural rootlessness and the break-up of families, deepens the gulf between the rich and the poor, plunging individuals, families and communities, particularly village communities into despair.

4. Putting in place a strong democratic life and consolidating a state of law, are powerful antidotes to this despair, for they make all citizens responsible for their own development and foster the unity of the nation. The Haitian people's culture of brotherhood and solidarity, which is based on their human and cultural values, is an important resource for creating relations of solidarity among citizens, moving beyond internal divisions. It is important not to let this fertile soil be exploited by a development that is limited solely to the economic and financial elements. To work for the moral and overall growth of society, one must encourage a policy that will enrich rural areas by intensifying communications networks, by setting up structures for health care, education and rural development. Indeed, the encouragement of relations and attention to basic health care and education are so many elements that can only contribute to the advancement of rural society, linking it with the urban areas. Imbalances at the heart of a society are always harmful and, in addition, sources of discontent among the population.

The fight against injustice and arbitrary methods also presupposes guaranteeing a legal system that is increasingly independent and just and which respects the rights of the poorest. Finally, every society must pay special attention to its young people who are as precious as the pupil of the eye, for they constitute the primary treasure of the nation. The education and formation of young people should preserve the force of hope and give them an opportunity to take part in the transformation of the country at various institutional levels. Moral and spiritual values are treasures that are passed down from generation to generation and prepare a people's future. It is right to make young people conscious of the common good and of solidarity, of respect for life from its conception, of the greatness of creation, placed in man's hands so that he may rightly shepherd it.

In the face of the endemic and ever more shocking scandal of poverty that creates permanent instability in the country and tears apart the social fabric, Haitians have always been able to show courage and tenacity in trial. As I said during my visit to your country in 1983 (cf. *Homily at Mass for the conclusion of the Eucharistic Congress of Haiti, ORE, 18 April 1983, p. 7*), it is important that those to whom the people have entrusted the noble mission of organizing and managing its *res publica* (government leaders) be ever more alert to the cry of the poor and not disappoint their hope. It is a sacred duty for all nations, and especially for those who govern them, to eliminate the root causes of poverty and despair, in order to restore to all human beings their fundamental dignity. In this perspective, it is particularly important that the political decisions taken by the authorities should have as their goal the good of the Haitian people and service to them, and that these decisions not be conditioned by personal or occult interests that wreak havoc on the smooth

functioning of institutions and keep alive inequalities. I warmly hope that encouragement will be given to all initiatives and forms of expression that enable Haitians to build their country and advance on the paths of new hope.

5. As you have pointed out, Mr Ambassador, the Catholic Church in Haiti, in the context of her pastoral mission and in the course of the history of the nation, through her own structures, and through the education she offers, has never relaxed in her dedication to the common good of the entire people of Haiti. She intends to pursue this mission in a spirit of dialogue and in collaboration with the institutions concerned and with all people of good will, thus fully participating in national life respecting the autonomy of the institutions of the state, in accord with her specific mission. On this solemn occasion, through you, I would like to give a warm greeting to the members of the Catholic community of Haiti. I invite them to stay united with their Pastors, whom I had the joy to receive last year for their *ad limina* visit, so that they may be the leaven of brotherhood and reconciliation in a united, fraternal nation where each one feels fully accepted and respected!

6. At the time when you are beginning your mission to the Apostolic See, I offer you my warmest wishes for your success. You may be sure that you will always be welcomed by my collaborators with the attention and understanding you may need.

For Your Excellency, for your family and for the entire Haitian people and their leaders, I wholeheartedly pray for an abundance of divine blessings.

**L'Osservatore Romano. Weekly Edition in English n.49 p.2.*

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