



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO H.E. MR PETER PATRICK KENNETH SIMMONS,
AMBASSADOR OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF BARBADOS***

Thursday, 20 May 1999

Mr Ambassador, I am pleased to welcome you today and to accept the Letters of Credence appointing you Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Commonwealth of Barbados to the Holy See, and I extend to you my good wishes for the success of your mission. I thank you for the greetings which you bring from the Prime Minister, Mr Owen Arthur, and I ask you to convey to him, to the Government and to the people of Barbados my own greetings and the assurance of my prayers for the well-being of the nation. I also thank you, Mr Ambassador, for your gracious words of appreciation of the Holy See's efforts "to direct attention to the plight of the poor, the destitute, the deprived, the dispossessed and the down-trodden all over the world". In fact, in the international forum the Holy See seeks to ensure that the needs of the weakest individuals and peoples are not disregarded and that the spiritual and moral dimensions of the great human problems of our day are not overlooked. The key questions of diplomacy no longer concern territorial sovereignty, borders and territory, even if in some parts of the world these remain a problem. The task nowadays has much to do with identifying responses to the challenges of globalization and the increased interdependence of nations. By and large, the threats to stability in the world now are different, as recent events have shown so dramatically. Ethnic tensions, the absence of democracy and respect for human rights, extreme poverty, social inequalities, environmental pollution: these are some of the questions which diplomacy is called to address. Barbados enjoys a degree of stability and prosperity, which is a significant achievement among the countries of the Caribbean region and makes Barbados well able to accept wider regional responsibilities. Yet this stability and prosperity are more fragile than they may seem: they can never be taken for granted and must always be vigorously defended. In the end, this will mean that both must be grounded upon a sure vision of the truth of the human person, the truth of the inalienable dignity and inviolable rights of every human being. Where this basis does not exist, political stability degenerates sooner or later into a political culture dominated by power and not service, by self-interest and not the common good. Similarly, when the truth of the human person is disregarded material prosperity comes to mean gross wealth for some and abject poverty for many. Society then becomes a battlefield, and all kinds of violence, both explicit and implicit, are unleashed. This is why it is heartening to learn of the Government's decision to establish the Ministry of Social Transformation. In a sense, this is the task of government as a whole – a service of the common good which transforms human society into a kind of family hearth where all have their rightful place. But there is always a need for agencies which focus specifically upon the weakest and most vulnerable members of society such as those you mention – "disabled children, the elderly, the homeless". There

are many criteria for assessing the health of a particular society, among them political stability and material prosperity. Yet the prime criterion is how that society treats those who are the weakest and most vulnerable, and ultimately it is on this basis that society will be judged. Time and again through this century we have witnessed the emergence of societies where the weak are cast aside and judged to be a burden, and we have seen the horrors that this has produced and is still producing. It must be everyone's determination not to let such things happen. To transform society and set it upon a firm foundation, we need in the first place to do all in our power to strengthen the basic cell of human society, the family. Where the family is weak, all other attempts to transform society will be ineffective. Where families are troubled and unsupported, we find a range of other problems appearing: unemployment, violence, sexual delinquency, drug and alcohol abuse are among the more common. I am happily aware, Mr Ambassador, that the Catholic Church in Barbados is a willing partner in efforts to support and strengthen family life. There are few more fundamental services which the Church can offer. Another vital element in the transformation of society is education, and Barbados has made outstanding efforts in this regard. Education must look to the integral development of the person, to those fundamental values without which the human being is reduced to an economic unit or a technical cypher. An integral education, however, is grounded upon the truth of the human person, and will therefore teach the young a sense of their own dignity and rights, which will lead them to respect both themselves and other people. With its long and varied experience in the field of education, the Catholic Church is well placed to help Barbados in this vital area. Mr Ambassador, I trust most sincerely that your service will further strengthen the bonds of friendship and understanding between the Commonwealth of Barbados and the Holy See. I assure you of the ready assistance of the various offices of the Holy See as you perform your duties. Upon yourself, your family and your country I invoke the abundant blessings of Almighty God.

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