
WHAT DOES POPE JOHN PAUL THINK, ABOUT CANADA?



Last August, when Pope John Paul welcomed Canada's new ambassador His Excellency Mr. Wilfrid-Guy Licari to the Holy See, he spoke at length about our country. As I am preparing to be in Rome from December 1 to 15, I thought I would like to share with you the Pope's words, especially regarding the 2002 World Youth Days, his view regarding the cancellation of debts of poor countries, and the banning of anti-personnel mines.

Besides, fast on the heels of the 2000 federal elections, I must say that this is the country which we must continue to build together.

CANADA AND YOUTH

« My wish was that the 2002 World Youth Days be held in Toronto, giving in this way all of the world youth and especially those of the vast American continent an opportunity to undergo a new faith experience and Church encounter. I want to thank the Canadian authorities and the local Church for the support they have given to this proposal and for the warm welcome with which this invitation was received, a welcome very much in the style of your country's tradition and culture. The recent World Youth Days which were held in Rome during this Jubilee Year are for the Church and for all national communities at all levels of society, a pressing invitation. In effect, today's youth showed in August in a more compelling way than at preceding gatherings its desire to live a beautiful and good life by turning to God and serving their neighbour. This reminds us that we have to pay attention to youth, to their intellectual and professional formation as well as to their broad human, moral, and spiritual education, especially the value of life from conception to its natural end, since it is a gift from God, and of which we are not the masters.

THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

« All authorities must help and support institutions and those involved in the education system, while allowing parents the possibility and the means of choosing where they are to have their children get an education which corresponds to what they are seeking. In effect, no one can take over parental responsibility in this field, and the national community can act only in a subsidiary mode. From this it follows that the institution of marriage and the family, as a basic cell and essential structure of society for which there can be no other substitute or equal structure, must be privileged in political and economic decisions. Parents – father and mother – who are the prime educators of their children, fulfill a social mission of the first rank. They are in charge of their children's spiritual, moral, and civic education. These parents need to be duly acknowledged, supported and seconded by the country's leaders. In like manner, religious authorities recognised by legitimate Authority must be enabled to bring their own input to the educational system to impart to our youth whose parents request it fundamental religious values and principles, in the respect of freedom of conscience.

CANADA AND CULTURES

« Canada is a vast country with many different human groups contributing to the national richness of its social fabric. It is important that every culture, some of which are the oldest on the continent, be truly recognised and

take an active part in the social life, in the respect of their specificity and in a natural concern for fairness and solidarity. In effect, to respect cultures whose members are called to act harmoniously and together is to foster the development of persons, understanding between all levels within the country, social cohesiveness, and the integration of the nation's vital forces, all for the greater good and upbuilding of society. There must be a permanent concern especially for those in society who are more and more relegated to the margins of economic support. It is in this same perspective that your fellow-citizens are called to show ever greater concern for the welcoming of strangers; I encourage them to so work that every homeless and shelterless person may, with the help of their fellow man, recover his or her dignity and live accordingly. Concern for immigrants, especially those from poor countries or regions at war, is a requirement of national and international life. No one can leave his or her neighbour without assistance or a place to settle down where one can find food, clothing, training, have personal property and everything needed for a decent living.

SOLIDARITY WITH POOR NATIONS

« From this perspective the year of the Great Jubilee is also an especially propitious occasion for Christians and all people of goodwill to develop solidarity with their brothers and sisters from poorer countries; likewise, it is fitting that richer nations support, through the significant gesture of remitting the international debt, the public life of these nations with the loan of persons qualified to bring them help for a limited time and with concern for teaching them how to develop a better organisation and sounder political, economic, and social management, in respect for of the identity of those nations concerned. I also appreciate your country's commitment to peace and to the abolition of anti-personnel mines which still claim too many victims throughout the world, especially children who will forever bear in their flesh the irresponsible decision of countries at war to indirectly attack defenceless civilian populations. In this Jubilee Year when Christ invites us to exercise greater mutual responsibility, I once again call on the international community to get as quickly as possible specialists to clean up those areas where these dangerous arms have been laid, and to stop their production in the first place. Men and women are the main richness of the planet, and interfering with one of them entails risks for all of humankind.»

PILGRIMAGE

May my pilgrimage to Rome on the occasion of Jubilee 2000 be profitable. May it be a source of countless graces for our entire Church.

+ François Thibodeau

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Bishop of Edmundston

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