

July 23 / Administration of George W. Bush, 2001

Remarks Prior to Discussions With Pope John Paul II at Castel Gandolfo,
Italy
July 23, 2001

Pope John Paul II. Mr. President, it gives me great pleasure to welcome you on your first visit since you assumed the office of the President of the United States. I warmly greet the distinguished guests, the First Lady and the members of your entourage. I express heartfelt good wishes that your Presidency will strengthen your country in its commitment to the principles which inspired American democracy from the beginning and sustained the Nation in its remarkable growth. These principles remain as valid as ever as you face the challenges of the new country opening up before us.

Your Nation's Founders, conscious of the immense natural and human resources with which your land has been blessed by the Creator, were guided by a profound sense of responsibility towards the common good to be pursued in respect for the God-given dignity and inalienable rights of all. America continues to measure herself by the nobility of her founding vision in building this society of liberty, equality, and justice under the law. In the century which has just ended, these same ideals inspired the American people to resist two totalitarian systems, based on an atheistic vision of man and society.

At the beginning of this new century, which also marks the beginning of the third millennium of Christianity, the world continues to look to America with hope. Yet it does so with an acute awareness of the crisis of values being experienced in Western society, ever more insecure in the face of the ethical decisions indispensable for humanity's future course.

In recent days, the world's attention has been focused on the process of globalization which has so greatly accelerated in the past decade and which you and other leaders of the industrialized nations have discussed in Genoa. While appre-

ciating the opportunities for economic growth and material prosperity, which this process offers, the church cannot but express profound concern that our world continues to be divided no longer by the former political and military blocs but by a tragic faultline between those who can benefit from these opportunities and those who seem cut off from them.

The revolution of freedom of which I spoke at the United Nations in 1995 must now be completed by a revolution of opportunity, in which all the world's peoples actively contribute to the economic prosperity and share in its fruits. This requires leadership by those nations whose religious and cultural traditions should make them most attentive to the moral dimension of the issues involved.

Respect for human dignity and belief in the equal dignity of all the members of the human family demand policies aimed at enabling all people to access to the means required to improve their lives, including the technological means and skills needed for development. Respect for nature by everyone, a policy of openness to immigrants, the cancellation or significant reduction of the debt of poorer nations, the promotion of peace through dialog and negotiation, the primacy of the rule of law—these are the priorities which the leaders of the developed countries cannot disregard. A global world is essentially a world of solidarity. From this point of view, America, because of her many resources, cultural traditions, and religious values, has a special responsibility.

Respect for human dignity finds one of its highest expressions in religious freedom. This right is the first listed in your Nation's Bill of Rights, and it is significant that the promotion of religious freedom continues to be an important goal of American policy

in the international community. I want to express the appreciation of the whole Catholic Church for America's commitment in this regard.

Another area in which political and moral choices have the gravest consequences for the future of civilization concerns the most fundamental of human rights, the right to life itself. Experience is already showing how a tragic coarsening of consciences accompanies the assault on innocent human life in the womb, leading to accommodation and acquiescence in the face of other related evils, such as euthanasia, infanticide, and most recently, proposals for the creation for research purposes of human embryos, destined to destruction in the process.

A free and virtuous society, which America aspires to be, must reject practices that devalue and violate human life at any stage from conception until natural death. In defending the right to life, in law and through a vibrant culture of life, America can show a world the path to a truly human future in which man remains the master, not the product, of his technology.

Mr. President, as you carry out the tasks of the high office which the American people have entrusted to you, I assure you of a remembrance in my prayers. I am confident that under your leadership, your Nation will continue to draw on its heritage and resources to help build a world in which each member of the human family can flourish and live in a manner worthy of his or her innate dignity. With these sentiments, I cordially invoke upon you and the beloved American people God's blessings of wisdom, strength, and peace.

Thank you very much.

President Bush. Your Holiness, thank you very much. Mrs. Bush and I are honored to stand with you today. We're grateful for your welcome. You've been to America many times and have spoken to vast

crowds. You have met with four American Presidents before me, including my father. In every visit and in every meeting, including our meeting today, you have reminded America that we have a special calling to promote justice and to defend the weak and suffering of the world. We remember your words, and we will always do our best to remember our calling.

Since October of 1978, you have shown the world not only the splendor of truth but also the power of truth to overcome evil and to redirect the course of history. You have urged men and women of good will to take to their knees before God and to stand unafraid before tyrants. And this has added greatly to the momentum of freedom in our time.

Where there's oppression, you speak of human rights. Where there's poverty, you speak of justice and hope. Where there's ancient hatred, you defend and display a tolerance that reaches beyond every boundary of race and nation and belief. Where there's great abundance, you remind us that wealth must be matched with compassion and moral purpose. And always, to all, you have carried the gospel of life, which welcomes the stranger and protects the weak and the innocent. Every nation, including my own, benefits from hearing and heeding this message of conscience.

Above all, you have carried the message of the Gospel into 126 nations and into the third millennium, always with courage and with confidence. You have brought the love of God into the lives of men, and that good news is needed in every nation and every age.

Thank you again, your Holiness, for your kindness and the honor of this meeting.

NOTE: The President spoke at approximately 11:46 a.m. in the Papal Library at Castel Gandolfo, summer residence of the Pope.