



The Holy See

**LETTER OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE NATIONAL BISHOPS' CONFERENCE
OF BRAZIL (CNBB)**

*To my Venerable Brother Bishop Jayme Henrique Chemello of Pelotas
President of the National Bishops' Conference of Brazil*

The happy event of the impending celebration of the 50th anniversary of the National Bishops' Conference of Brazil at the very beginning of this new millennium, is a splendid opportunity to meet to reflect and pray, and, above all, to give thanks to God the Giver of all good things through the work done by the Church for the people of Brazil. At the same time, it expresses the confidence that in this institution God will preserve an undying spirit of service and evangelical energy for the promotion of unity.

I was happy to learn of the central theme chosen for the 40th General Assembly: The CNBB, 50 years: *Historical Presence, Challenges and Prospects*. It clearly reveals the objective of a faithful "aggiornamento" and serene renewal, to bring a better coordination of ecclesial life in the wide range of the Church's pastoral activities.

The CNBB is an organization destined to be a concrete instrument of affective and effective communion among all the Bishops, and of efficient collaboration with the diocesan ordinaries of every particular Church in the three-fold office of teaching, sanctifying and governing their flocks. It is also true that since 14 October 1952, the Church in Brazil, faithful to her glorious past, has opened deep furrows of continuity both in evangelization and in a better understanding of what will nourish the growth of the Kingdom of God in this world.

Continuity with the past and openness to the challenges of the future must be the constants of the "solicitude for all the Churches" which the Apostle Paul does not hesitate to found on "toil and hardship", for the good of all our brethren in the faith (cf. II Cor 11,27-28).

In the Decree *Christus Dominus*, the Second Vatican Council recognized in the Bishops' Conferences that already existed at that time the opportune benefit and fruitfulness considering "that it would be in the highest degree helpful if in all parts of the world the bishops of each country or region would meet regularly, so that by sharing their wisdom and experience and exchanging views they may jointly formulate a programme for the common good of the Church" (n. 37). In this way the CNBB can consider itself a precursor in time and space of many initiatives, certainly not exclusively Brazilian, that had a strong impact on society as a whole and on each one of its communities. So I can only recall here the fruitful experience not only with the Conference's internal organization but also its direction in support of the desires of the bishops, for a more effective evangelization throughout Brazil. Thus the influence of the *Fraternity Campaign* that was promoted at first on the diocesan level in 1963 and later extended to the whole of Brazil. In my series of annual Messages, I have always wanted to show my affection for the Brazilian people, in order to give a greater impetus to evangelization and to promote a designated form of charity for the Churches in greatest need.

Moreover, the vastness, depth and speed of change in the world in which we live, and the impact on human persons and groups, along with the ease of and obvious influence of communications which make people ever more present to one another, oblige us to continue to seek to discern the signs of the times. The zealous and vigilant presence of the Bishops in national life, like leaven in the dough, served as a courageous incentive to help people take the path marked out by the Second Vatican Council, especially in the area of ecclesial life, social justice and unity among Christians with all our separated brothers and sisters. I well know how much evangelical prudence demands of us if we are to discover the times and ways with which Jesus Christ, "Yesterday and today and for ever" (Heb 13,8), is to make his voice heard through his pastors. However, "if I am to preach the Gospel", said the Apostle to the Gentiles, "that gives me no grounds for boasting. For necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel" (I Cor 9,16).

For this reason I am repeating here that: "since the doctrine of the faith is a common good of the whole Church and a bond of communion, the Bishops, assembled in Episcopal Conference, must take special care to follow the Magisterium of the universal Church and to communicate it opportunely to the people entrusted to them" (Apostolic Letter *Apostolos suos*, n. 21). These are my hopes, in continuity with that process begun by courageous missionaries and evangelizers, in the five centuries of the history of the Church in Brazil, "the Land of the Holy Cross".

This country, that is really a continent, constantly calls for new labourers for its harvests, and year after year the Bishops' Conference has tried to respond with caring concern to the Lord's mandate to proclaim the Gospel, trusting in his promise that he "will be with us always, to the close of the age" (Mt 28,20). Here I express my appreciation for your efforts in the vital field of vocation recruitment, formation of the clergy and the advancement of the laity. In this regard, I strongly recommend that you make the special mission of the ministerial priesthood shine out more clearly, as a perennial guarantee of the sacramental presence of the risen Christ and of the specific

vocation of lay people who have their own way of sharing in the mission of the whole People of God, in the Church and the world (cf. *Novo Millennio ineunte*, n. 46).

I would like to add that these, like other challenges for such a large episcopate, demands constant co-operation, which is certainly fostered by the common work carried out by this Bishops' Conference, and which must continue, as a model of dialogue among the bishops themselves: a dialogue between bishops and priests, between pastors and faithful, between the Church in Brazil and the Apostolic See. Will this not be a concrete means of reinforcing that spirituality of communion that I proposed in my recent Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio ineunte* (cf. nn. 44-45)?

There is no doubt that collegial affectivity forms the basis of the new Statutes, that aim at defining more clearly the episcopal character of the Conference, ensuring the direction of its activities by the bishops whom the Holy Spirit has placed to "feed the Church of the Lord" (Acts 20,28). In this way through the reciprocal exchange of experiences and opinions, in episcopal brotherhood and shared pastoral responsibility the bishops will respond to the demands of the new evangelization.

Certain of the interest with which I follow the pastoral solicitude of my Brothers in the Episcopate of this beloved country, and in the spirit of sincere union in the self-giving love with which Christ redeemed us, I entrust the members of the National Bishops' Conference of Brazil to the protection of *Nossa Senhora Aparecida (Our Lady who Appeared)*, and, in the joyful celebrations for the 50th anniversary, I pray for the light of the Holy Spirit so that, guided by Christ the Way, united by Christ the Truth and confirmed by Christ the Life, they will make the spotless face of the Church, our Mother and our Teacher, shine forth. With my Apostolic Blessing, that I extend to all the faithful of Brazil.

From the Vatican, 7 April 2002, 24th year of my Pontificate.

JOHN PAUL II