



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER
POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO H.E. Dr GUILLERMO LEÓN ESCOBAR-HERRÁN,
AMBASSADOR OF COLOMBIA TO THE HOLY SEE***

Saturday, 7 November 1998

Mr. Ambassador,

1. In accepting the Letters of Credence appointing you as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Colombia to the Holy See, I am first of all pleased to offer you a most cordial welcome and to thank you for the kind words you have addressed to me and for the respectful greeting of President Andrés Pastrana Arango, which I gratefully and sincerely reciprocate, together with my best wishes for him and for all the beloved Colombian nation.

2. This occasion, Mr Ambassador, marks the beginning of your high and noble office of representing your country to the Holy See and it is an opportunity to reflect on the great responsibility you are assuming, as well as on the importance of your role. In fact, a diplomatic mission by its nature aims at dialogue, to seek ways that lead to good understanding and co-operation among peoples.

The persistence of many conflicts which afflict humanity today, with their devastating and tragic consequences, make more and more intolerable the idea of a humanity that is still unable to overcome its differences through dialogue and reconciliation. In addition, there is the conviction that peace does not only mean the silencing of weapons, but that it is necessary to go to the very roots of what makes force and selfish interest the ultimate principle of human conduct. This is why the service to peace becomes, in reality, a commitment to justice.

Justice, in turn, is never complete or lasting without promoting the dignity of individuals and peoples, and rigorous respect for the inalienable rights that flow from that dignity.

These are the values that govern the Holy See's activities in the concert of international relations, in which it claims to have no other power than that of its own convictions nor other interest than that of bringing people to the fulfilment of their

sublime vocation as children of God, by carrying out its mission of proclaiming Christ's message and calling it to mind. These are the terms in which the Holy See deals with its interlocutors, highlighting the ethical dimension of the social and political phenomena of each moment, thus going to the very root of the problems to help solve them practically.

3. The world in this last part of the century is experiencing as never before the impact of the globalization process: communications are increasing, exchanges are growing and once strong barriers seem to be crumbling in the face of technological progress. It is a situation rich in unprecedented possibilities, but also in enormous challenges, which increasingly call for great responsibility and a profound ethical sense from those who must make decisions that could jeopardize the destiny of human society.

This is clearly happening in the economy, where a series of factors and agents are linked with one another in close interdependence, whether within each nation or on an international scale, to the point that it is almost unthinkable that certain problem situations could be resolved without the determined and concerted solidarity of a whole country and the co-operation of the international community. In this respect, I would like to recall that "the decision to invest in one place rather than another, in one productive sector rather than another, is always a moral and cultural choice" (Encyc. *Centesimus annus*, n. 36). In fact, respect for the human person and his fundamental right to lead a worthy life must prevail over interests of accumulating benefits or maintaining privileged positions.

4. Social imbalances and the inordinate difference in the distribution of material resources at times initiate processes of conflict and violence. But these can also have other origins and, in any, case give rise to new situations of instability and injustice, thus continuing a harmful cycle that affects the entire life of citizens and mortgages their harmonious and integral development. For this reason your Government's serious commitment to establishing peace in a climate of national reconciliation, undertaken with determination and breadth of vision, should thus be appreciated. In this regard, the Church, in fidelity to and consistent with the Gospel of life, must always condemn every attack on the integrity and freedom of individuals, every terrorist act against innocent people, including those whose only mission is to serve the community in the pastoral ministry.

Also in this most painful area, the art of dialogue, the primacy of a State governed by law, the sincere search for the common good and respect for the inalienable rights of the person, guarantee a satisfactory and lasting outcome.

5. A most important factor for the stability and growth of any society is attention to the family. This basic cell of life in every country needs the support and co-operation of the public authorities, following a correct application of the principle of subsidiarity, so that the family can achieve its particular goals. Favourable conditions should be created so that families can be established, stably maintain themselves in worthy conditions, welcome the gift of life without fear and exercise the fundamental right to educate their children properly. This right of parents to choose the educational model for their children must be safeguarded and encouraged with the proper help of the State, thus guaranteeing its effective exercise.

The deplorable cases of abandoned children, drug-dependent children and adolescents, child prostitution and other tragic situations that affect young people, frequently stem from an unhappy or broken home life caused by various circumstances. For this reason, Mr Ambassador, the programmes your Government is carrying out in this sensitive area

should be appreciated, in the hope that it will continue in this direction, as a very suitable means for achieving constant and encouraging social progress in this beloved country.

6. I am pleased to see that the good relations between Colombia and the Holy See encourage honest collaboration in the respective areas of their competence, in order to serve people and society better. But over and above mere formal relations, Mr Ambassador, you mentioned this Apostolic See's affection for the Colombian people. This is certainly a long-standing sentiment, because of the deeply Christian roots of your nation, which was confirmed by my venerable Predecessor Paul VI's visit, whose 30th anniversary was celebrated this year.

I personally recall with deep gratitude [my visit to Colombia in 1986](#). Those unforgettable days showed the authentic face of Colombian society, the firm faith of its people, their mutual solidarity, their deep sense of hospitality, their ability to share and to work together, their joy of life. All this represents a rich spiritual and cultural heritage, which enables us to cherish well-founded hopes for a better future.

Mr Ambassador, as I ask you to convey these sentiments and hopes to your Government and to the beloved Colombian people, I express my best wishes for the fruitful exercise of the lofty mission entrusted to you. As a pledge of the divine favours that will help you fulfil your duties, and as I invoke the motherly protection of the Virgin Mary, Our Lady of Chiquinquirá, I cordially impart to you my Apostolic Blessing, which I am pleased to extend to your distinguished family and staff, and to all the citizens of your beloved nation.

**L'Osservatore Romano. Weekly edition in English n.50 p.6.*

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