



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER TO THE NEW AMBASSADOR OF ECUADOR*

Thursday 14 October 1999

Mr Ambassador,

1. I am very pleased to welcome you and to receive you in this solemn occasion for the presentation of the Letters of Credence appointing you as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Ecuador to the Holy See. I am very grateful to you for your kind words to me, and for the cordial and respectful greeting from President Jamil Mahuad, to whom I ask you to convey my best wishes for peace and well-being, as well as for the prosperity and overall progress of the beloved Ecuadorean nation.

2. In your words you referred to the Peace Agreement signed a little over a year ago between your country and the sister Republic of Peru, in whose negotiations you had an important role. I was pleased to see that my appeals for respectful dialogue and for honest and fitting negotiations between the two parties were welcomed, thus paving the way to a new phase between these two Latin American countries, which have many values in common. The ability to solve an age-old problem should enable Ecuadoreans to deepen their roots in the peaceful tradition of that region, just as they should feel directly involved in the fight against drug trafficking and corruption, social scourges which especially affect the young and which endanger social peace and stability. In this regard, it is hoped that Ecuador will find in the international community all the support and financial help necessary to deal with them.

3. On the other hand, I know that your country's serious economic situation, due to heavy external and internal debt, is being seriously addressed by all the political, economic and social leaders. On different occasions I have referred to this grave situation, which on a world scale presents many problems and prevents many countries from emerging from underdevelopment and reaching

desirable levels of prosperity. In this regard, I wish to reaffirm what I stated in the Apostolic Letter *Tertio millennio adveniente* (cf. n. 51), with the hope that it will encourage proper development for everyone.

It is also important that Ecuadorean society become aware of this, and with an attitude of true solidarity be willing to make the necessary sacrifices, which must in no way worsen the impoverished state of the lower classes. It is to be hoped that Ecuador, some of whose territories have been seriously affected by recent natural disasters, will be able to benefit from special consideration by the international organizations. At present, I am following the news about the activity of the Pichincha volcano, with the hope that it causes no further damage.

4. I am pleased to see that your country's Constitution considers the importance of education and ratifies the recognition of the rights of parents in their children's education. This is an important step compared to the State-controlled regime typical of past times, which has been given prominence in the law granting parents the freedom to request a religious education for their children according to their own belief. This freedom to be open to the transcendent is not the privilege of any social class, but an indispensable condition for children and young people to receive complete formation that will enable them to forge a more human, decent and united world.

This law certainly also allows the Dioceses to collaborate in appropriate ways in the State schools. It is also to be hoped that, at the university level, the principle of religious freedom should prevail in the corresponding legislation so that the special organization of Catholic universities is respected and thus serves as a model for recognizing the legitimate autonomy which the university must have.

5. Mr Ambassador, you also referred to Church-State relations in Ecuador, which have been marked by mutual respect and cordiality. Respect, so as not to interfere in what is proper to each institution, but which leads to mutual support and collaboration, in order to achieve the greatest well-being for the national community. For this reason, and through constructive dialogue, it is possible to promote fundamental values for the ordering and development of society. In this regard, although the Church's mission is spiritual and not political, the fostering of warm relations between Church and State certainly contributes to the harmony, progress and well-being of all, without any distinction.

6. As you begin the high office to which you have been appointed, I would like to offer you my best wishes for the happy and successful accomplishment of your mission to this Apostolic See. As I ask you kindly to convey these sentiments to your President, your Government, the authorities and the beloved Ecuadorean people, I assure you of my prayers to the Almighty, that with his gifts he will always help you, your distinguished family, your staff, the leaders and the citizens of your noble country, whom I always remember with special affection.

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