



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II
TO THE NEW AMBASSADOR
OF BOLIVIA TO THE HOLY SEE***

Thursday, 8 June 2000

Mr Ambassador,

1. I am pleased to receive you at this solemn ceremony for the presentation of the Letters of Credence appointing you as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Bolivia to the Holy See. In offering you my cordial welcome, I would like to thank you for your kind words and for the considerate greeting which your President, General Hugo Banzer, has conveyed to me through you and which I reciprocate, asking you to give him my best wishes for the peace and prosperity of all the Bolivian people.

2. Your presence here today, as you yourself mentioned, reminds me of the Pastoral Visit I made to your country in 1988. On that occasion I was able to admire the outstanding gifts of the Bolivian people, fashioned by a multicultural and multiethnic reality, the result of the meeting of indigenous cultures, such as the Aymaran, Quechuan and others, with those that arrived here down the centuries, a meeting which "has richness in variety, sharing both mutual respect and dialogue" (*Address at El Alto Airport*, 9 May 1988, n. 3; *L'Osservatore Romano* English edition, 6 June 1988, p. 3). It is to be hoped that Bolivians will always preserve the genuine values that form their rich spiritual heritage and will enable the country to advance towards better, more just and fraternal goals, in fidelity to the Christian and humanist roots which have shaped its history and which it must continue to follow by building itself up on the way to the future, on the religious and ethical bases that promote the individual and recognize his inalienable and inviolable dignity.

3. You also referred to the structural changes currently being made in Bolivia to deal with the crisis that is afflicting a large part of the population, by trying to alleviate the situation in the poorest regions. I am pleased to know that this is one of your Government's objectives, and I hope it will

continue this inescapable task with determination and firm commitment. In fact, material poverty can never be regarded as an endemic evil but as a lack of the goods essential to personal development resulting from various circumstances. In this regard, the Church is sensitive to the difficult situation experienced by our many brothers and sisters trapped in sometimes extreme poverty, and, compelled by the Gospel, she constantly affirms her commitment to the poor as an expression of the merciful love which Jesus Christ showed them. Therefore the Church herself, with her doctrine and charitable programmes, supports those who work seriously so that social institutions will also be effectively committed to human advancement. In this way the precarious situations encountered by so many individuals and families, especially the indigenous, can be alleviated.

In this regard, a few weeks ago the Bishops in Bolivia presented the President of the Republic with the document *Conclusiones Foro Jubileo 2000*, a project of the Bolivian Episcopal Conference aimed at discussing the delicate problem of the country's structural poverty and at enabling citizens of various social classes and different political tendencies to express their opinions on the use of funds made available by the cancellation of the external debt.

The moral and social scars of poverty certainly require technical and political solutions, so that the economic activities and benefits they legitimately produce can also serve the common good. In my Message for the 1993 World Day of Peace, I wrote in this regard: "A State, whatever its political organization or economic system, remains fragile and unstable if it does not give constant attention to its weakest members and if it fails to do everything possible to ensure that at least their primary needs are satisfied" (n. 3). However, it should not be forgotten that all these measures would be insufficient if they were not inspired by authentic ethical and spiritual values. This is why the eradication of poverty is also a moral task in which justice and Christian solidarity play an essential part.

4. Under the Bishops' wise and caring guidance, the Church in your country is working generously and enthusiastically to accomplish her mission. She thus fosters moral values and the Christian concept of life, so deeply rooted there, so that they will continue to inspire the lives of its citizens, and that those who in one way or another exercise various degrees of responsibility will be mindful of these values, in order to build day by day a country that is ever better and more prosperous, and in which everyone sees his inalienable rights respected.

The Church also carries out the mission entrusted to her by her divine Founder in various fields such as, among others, the defence of life and the family institution, the promotion of justice and attention to the neediest. At the same time, she seeks to promote, on the basis of her social doctrine, peaceful and well-ordered social relations among citizens and among nations. The Church herself, who never claims to impose concrete criteria for the government of the people, nevertheless has the inescapable duty to shed the light of faith on the development of the society in which she is involved. In this regard, as you yourself pointed out, the Bolivian Episcopal

Conference has worked and will continue to work to spread its message as a pressing appeal to solidarity and commitment for the benefit of all, with no one excluded, especially since there are situations which urgently call for a solution. In this regard, the Bolivian Episcopal Conference recently published a Pastoral Letter entitled "*Tierra, Madre Fecunda para todos*", in which they offer a reflection to highlight the agrarian reform which is so needed to alleviate the critical situation experienced by the indigenous and farm workers.

5. Mr Ambassador, at the end of this meeting I would like to offer you my best wishes for the fulfilment of your mission to this Apostolic See, which is always desirous of maintaining and further strengthening its good relations with the Republic of Bolivia, and of helping to overcome with good will the problems that may arise between the Church and State in your country. I assure you of my prayers to the Almighty that, through the intercession of Our Lady of Copacabana, he will always assist you and your distinguished family, your staff, the authorities and the citizens of your noble country, which I remember with great affection and upon which I invoke the abundant blessings of the Most High.

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