



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II
TO THE NEW AMBASSADOR
OF THE BOLIVARIAN REPUBLIC OF VENEZUELA
TO THE HOLY SEE***

Monday, 6 November 2000

Mr Ambassador, 1. I am pleased to receive the Letters accrediting you as Ambassador of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to the Holy See and offer you my cordial welcome, as I express my best wishes for the mission which has been entrusted to you. I would also like to express my deep gratitude for the respectful greeting from the President of the Republic, which Your Excellency has transmitted to me, while at the same time I ask you to convey my special closeness to the Venezuelan people, to whom I wish continuous prosperity and perceptible growth in their social well-being at this phase in their political and institutional life. I take this opportunity to repeat the message of encouragement I left them at the end of my second visit to the country, when I invited them to make *"the Christian and ethical values which have shaped your national life factors of social cohesion, progress and peace"* (*Departure address*, 11 February 1996, n. 2). Venezuela is a splendid country, with its natural beauty and cultural riches, which Christopher Columbus called "the land of grace" and which has experienced unusual demographic and socio-economic growth in the century now ending. I became personally acquainted with it during my two Pastoral Visits, feeling the warm welcome and hopes that beat in the heart of its open and generous people. I therefore rejoice in its achievements, share in its concerns and join in its sorrow at times of misfortune such as the time when, almost a year ago, natural disasters sowed death and devastation in the country, and have also made themselves felt even more recently. On these as on other occasions, I call on the Lord to help the beloved Venezuelan children and urgently request national and international human solidarity for the victims. 2. In carrying out the mission entrusted to you by your Government, you will be responsible for constantly maintaining and furthering your country's diplomatic relations with the Holy See. The latter, because of the Pope's concern for all the Churches, follows events in each place with interest. You can therefore be certain that you will find here the support and welcome you need, and can be assured that the Church, and the Holy See in particular, have no interests in Venezuela other than the good of Venezuelans themselves, to whom she proclaims the Gospel in fulfilment of the mission entrusted to her by Christ. In fact, the Church's activity and that of the public authorities are directed to the same people, since both parties have the material and spiritual good of the human person, at a given time in history, as their goal. Thus with exquisite respect for their respective duties, the relations between them must consist, above all, in dialogue and cooperation. The Church is responsible for areas which concern the values that, in turn, constitute a nation's soul. In this regard, she points out the danger of two threats hanging over the human community: one that claims "to be able to lead

history towards perfect goodness" (*Centesimus annus*, n. 45), and the other which proposes political action that is free from the guidance of truth; indeed, "as history demonstrates, a democracy without values easily turns into open or thinly disguised totalitarianism" (ibid., n. 46). Certainly, the Church has neither the duty nor the pretension to compete with political programmes to solve the technical and administrative dimension of social problems, which is the task of the civil authority. In this regard, as St Augustine said, the Church considers herself a pilgrim and is "guided by faith, not by vision" (*De civ. Dei.*, 19, 14). Nevertheless, through her feeling for the human person, her interest in solidarity and her attention to the weakest, she can help to establish a better social life. Moreover, the citizens, seeing concretely that their reasons for living and spiritual convictions are appreciated and respected by the public authorities, will be better disposed to participate confidently and peacefully in the common project of society, which will certainly be beneficial to all.³ As in the past, in the current circumstances the Venezuelan people will benefit from the firm commitment of the Church and her Pastors to support fundamental human rights, from her determined defence of life from the moment of conception to its natural end, from her intense and constant educational work, from her promotion of the family as a natural institution and the primary cell of society, and from her dedication to rescuing many citizens from the fetters of poverty, hunger, the corruption of morals and many other forms of social marginalization. She does so inspired by the Gospel that sheds light on temporal realities in the light of the sublime vocation to which man has been called by God, in the firm conviction that this is the best way to serve individuals and peoples. By virtue of her mission, the Church requires the necessary room for her activities and concretely cooperates with the civil authorities to have regularly available the necessary social space and means to carry them out. The very people she serves, by trying to make them good Christians and honest citizens who are committed to the country's progress, are those towards whom, in their own area of competence, the public authorities have a duty. Then there should be no reticence, much less rivalry, in matters in which the common good and a future worthy of the people are decided, such as the defence without palliatives of human dignity in its integrity, of an education open to the transcendent dimension of the person, which cannot disregard the religious aspect or the fundamental social and civil rights of every human being. The serious challenges emerging in the third millennium call for people to join forces, in the unanimous conviction that the "defence of the universality and indivisibility of human rights is essential for the construction of a peaceful society and for the overall development of individuals, peoples and nations" (*Message for World Day of Peace*, 1 January 1999, n. 3).⁴ During my two visits to Venezuela, I had the opportunity to meet a people eager to build their future on their traditional identity, with the deep Christian roots which have grown into so many expressions of popular piety and devotion to the Virgin Mary. It was on my first visit that I crowned the image of Our Lady of Coromoto and, on my second, that I inaugurated the shrine dedicated to her. Today I call upon her again to protect the beloved people of Venezuela and to guide them with her motherly tenderness to her divine Son, the only Saviour of the human race. In this year of grace in which we commemorate the 2,000th anniversary of his coming with the Great Jubilee, I ask the Lord to pour out his blessings upon all the Venezuelan people so that they may enter the new millennium with renewed hope and a desire to build a better world. Mr Ambassador, I wish you success in the mission you are now beginning and a pleasant stay in Rome with your distinguished

family.

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