



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER
TO THE NEW AMBASSADOR OF PERU
TO THE HOLY SEE***

Friday, 16 February 2001

Mr Ambassador,

1. It is a great pleasure to receive you at this formal presentation of the Letters of Credence appointing you Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Peru to this Holy See, and I would like to offer you my most cordial welcome as you begin the important duties entrusted to you by your Government. I am grateful for your kind words and especially for the greeting of President Valentín Paniagua Corazao, which I return with my best wishes that his service to the Peruvian people at this moment in their history will help them all to advance on the path of harmony, mutual understanding and peace.

2. You come as the representative of a people who, as you recalled in your address, have deep historical roots as the repository of a rich cultural and moral heritage. Indeed, the Inca civilization, emblematic of Peru's magnificent past, was blended with Western culture down the centuries from the time when the Gospel arrived, making Peruvians a profoundly religious people of whom Christianity is a distinctive feature. In this environment, faith and piety have borne excellent fruits, among which the Church honours Sts Turibius of Mogrovejo, Martin de Porres, Juan Macías, Francis Solano, Rose of Lima and Bl. Ana de los Ángeles Monteagudo.

You also mentioned the two unforgettable visits that I made to your country, the first in 1985 and the second, three years later, for the closing of the Bolivarian Eucharistic Congress. On both occasions I had the joy of meeting an open and welcoming people, whom I encourage to continue on the good path they have undertaken, making the most of all the resources on which the Peruvian soul can rely.

3. The Church's contribution has been broad and generous in the almost 500 years that she has proclaimed the Good News to all Peru's inhabitants. This service to Peruvians was also recognized by the Constitution, which states in Article 50 that the Church has played an "important role in the historical, cultural and moral formation of Peru". In fact, it is easy to discern these features in the important moments of Peruvian history.

You also mentioned the Church's involvement in education by establishing schools and universities, as well as in the fields of health care and assistance to the neediest. The Peruvian Episcopate has made a firm commitment to continue in this direction, as I wrote recently, "carrying on the tradition of charity which has expressed itself in so many different ways in the past two millennia, but which today calls for even greater resourcefulness" (*Novo millennio ineunte*, n. 50).

The Church also contributes to the good of society with her social teaching. She does not, in fact, try to solve social problems from the technical or administrative standpoint, which is the task of the civil authority, but through her sense of the person, promotion of solidarity and concern for the weakest, she seeks to help build a better social life.

4. The political and institutional crisis that your country has been experiencing in recent months, and which you also mentioned, Mr Ambassador, has given rise to serious problems for the nation. I have attentively followed the unfolding of events, asking the Lord that the life of Peruvians might not be disturbed. It is now necessary to join forces, to put aside partisan approaches, so that, with everyone's collaboration and with honour and good will, a climate of trust, real justice, trustworthiness, transparency, mutual respect, peace and freedom may be fostered. In this way the Peruvian people will be able to overcome this crisis and restore the moral values of a just, equitable, united and honest society, promoting a State governed by law in which all citizens feel co-responsible and share in building the homeland and working for their common good.

In this regard, it will be important to work on improving the economic situation and overcoming the shameful poverty caused by the heavy external and internal debt, which must be tackled by all social leaders. I have mentioned on various occasions this serious worldwide problem, hoping for a cancellation, or at least a substantial reduction, in the external debt by the creditor countries, which will enable countries in these circumstances to face the future with optimism, promote suitable development and achieve desirable levels of well-being.

The return to democratic normalcy must necessarily be accompanied by the restoration of genuine moral and ethical principles. Indeed, as I have said many times, political life cannot disregard respect for truth and values, since, "as history demonstrates, a democracy without values easily turns into open or thinly disguised totalitarianism" (*Centesimus annus*, n. 46).

I would also like to mention the peace process with your sister nation of Ecuador, with which an Agreement has been signed that was also supported by the self-sacrificing cooperation of both

Episcopal Conferences. It is indispensable to resist any temptation to turn back, but to move forward in the climate of coexistence that marks countries united by so many values and in conformity with the region's peaceful tradition. Moreover, your country has resolved its unsettled issues with Chile by signing, in November 1999, the Act of Execution of the clauses of the 1929 Treaty of Lima, by which Peru showed its willingness to concentrate its efforts on the development and prosperity of its society.

5. In conclusion, Mr Ambassador, I offer you my best wishes for the success of your mission. At the Holy See you will find the greatest cooperation for everything that can serve the prosperity of the beloved Peruvian people and for the good relations between your country and this Apostolic See. I ask the Lord, through the intercession of Our Lady of Evangelization and all the Peruvian saints, to assist you in the fulfilment of your duties and to bless your distinguished family, your staff and all the leaders and citizens of the noble Peruvian nation, whom I always remember with deep affection and esteem.

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