



The Holy See

DISCORSO DI GIOVANNI PAOLO II DURANTE LA VISITA UFFICIALE DEL PRESIDENTE DELLA REPUBBLICA DEL PARAGUAY*

Venerdì, 17 febbraio 1995

Mr. President,

1. It gives me great pleasure this morning to receive the President of the Republic of Paraguay, accompanied by his distinguished entourage. In expressing my deep gratitude to you for this visit, which underscores your closeness and respect for the Apostolic See, I would like to offer you my respectful greetings, together with my warmest welcome.

This visit not only shows your desire to express your noble personal sentiments, but it is above all a reflection of the good relations between Paraguay and the Holy See. At the same time it reflects the respectful and loyal collaboration between the local Church and the State.

2. Your presence here today reminds me of the Pastoral Visit I made in May 1988, which acquainted me with the moral and religious values of the Paraguayan people, who were thrilled over the building of a reconciled and fraternal country in a spirit of unity, as I said in my speech on that occasion. Several years later, I would like to repeat my last words in your land. "The Pope is leaving, but he carries you in his heart" (Farewell Speech, 18 May 1988; L'Osservatore Romano English edition, 4 July 1988, p. 9).

3. Keeping these very words in mind and motivated by my concern for all the Churches, I have followed the religious and social developments in your country with keen interest. With reference to your country, a series of important changes have taken place over the past few years which should be recognized and identified. These include the approval and taking effect of a new Constitution, a useful instrument for the democratization of social life and for offering greater participation to all citizens.

The path you have chosen is a challenge for the nation's future. Many issues must be faced in

order to build up and reinforce an atmosphere of peaceful harmony among all, one which fosters the citizens' trust in the various public institutions and authorities. At all times they should serve and promote the common good as their *raison d'être* and the priority aim of their activity. Thus, even in a political system like that in force in Paraguay, whose Government is backed by a specific party, Government action must be above any individual interest and free from partisan influence. It should realize that the nation's good must take precedence over each political party's programme.

The desire to promote the proper economic and social development implies the adopting of initiatives calculated to raise the citizens' standard of living. These initiatives must always be inspired by ethical principles that involved fairness and the necessary contribution of efforts and sacrifices by all. The common goal is to serve the Paraguayan people and their present material needs, and to provide for those of the future; to fight with perseverance against poverty and unemployment; to transform the potential resources of nature with hard work and responsibility, constancy and honest management, to distribute wealth more justly, reducing the inequalities that lead to marginalization and are an offense to those who are brothers and sisters, children of the same Father, sharing alike in the gifts that the Creator has put into the hands of all.

Above all it is the public authorities' role to see that the most underprivileged social classes, for example, those with the least financial resources, the campesinos, the indigenous peoples or youth, are not hit the hardest by economic readjustments. For this reason, let me recall once again the social teachings of the Church, a doctrine which must be the source of principles inspiring all those who work for the good of individuals, families and society.

In this context it is necessary to strengthen the fundamental values of society, such as respect for the truth, firm commitment to justice and solidarity, honesty, the ability to dialogue and participation at all levels. As the Magisterium of the Church has frequently proclaimed, it is necessary to continue to promote and encourage living conditions which enable individuals and families, as well as intermediate groups and associations, to fulfil themselves and realize their legitimate aspirations.

4. To achieve a truly integral progress, attention must also be devoted to culture and to promoting education in authentic moral and spiritual values. Paraguay's relations with neighbouring States, as well as with many other countries of the world, make it vulnerable to specific cultural influences, to which the media greatly contribute. This consideration requires the ongoing promotion of a genuine cultural policy that reinforces and spreads the above mentioned basic values in a society which, like yours, is rooted in faith and in Christian principles.

Education is a basic factor for a country called to play an ever more active role in the concert of nations. This is why your people should be offered better and more suitable training. In this regard, it is to be hoped that the educational reform already under way in Paraguay, achieves its goals, making a proper education available to all and providing the necessary conditions for the new

generations to assume fully their responsibilities as citizens and to collaborate actively in the nation's welfare.

5. Mr. President, since its origins as a nation many deep bonds have linked the Republic of Paraguay with the Holy See. Indeed, its people can rejoice in the truth of their Christian roots since the Catholic religion is an essential part of their history. In this respect, I am pleased to recall that since the first evangelization on the American continent, the faith has taken root in your country, being particularly expressed in the so called "Reducciones", a religious and social structure in which your first saint, Roque Gonzalez, distinguished himself.

On this occasion I would like to assure you, Mr President, that the Church in Paraguay, as the Bishops, her legitimate representatives have repeatedly shown, definitely wants to continue co operating with the authorities and the various public institutions in serving the great causes of man, as a citizen and a child of God (cf. *Gaudium et spes*, n. 76). It is to be hoped that a constructive and frequent dialogue between the civil authorities and the Pastors of the Church may strengthen relations between the two institutions. For its own part, the Bishops, priests and religious communities will continue tirelessly to carry out their work of evangelization, social assistance and education for the good of society. They are encouraged to do so by their vocation to serve all, especially the neediest, thus contributing to the overall advancement of the Paraguayan people and to the protection and promotion of the highest values.

Before bringing this meeting to a close, I would again like to express, Mr President, my sincere gratitude to you for this friendly visit. I hope very much that history will prove your personal commitment and that of your Government to fully achieving the modern development of Paraguayan society, in accordance with values based on Christian ethics, so deeply rooted in the religious and cultural tradition of the whole population. Spiritually prostrate before the image of the Pure and Immaculate Conception in Caacupe, so widely venerated by Catholics in Paraguay, I fervently ask the Almighty to pour forth abundant gifts and blessings upon you, Mr. President, upon your family and upon your co workers in the Government, and above all upon the beloved children of this noble country.

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