



# The Holy See

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***ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II  
to the President of VENEZUELA,  
H.E.Mr. Rafael CALDERA\****

*5 May 1995*

*Mr. President,*

1. It is a great pleasure to me to receive you, accompanied by your distinguished entourage, on a visit to the Eternal City. You are leading your country's official delegation to the beatification ceremony of Mother Maria of St Joseph, the first daughter of the beloved Venezuelan people to be raised to the honours of the altar. As I express my deep gratitude to you for this meeting, which once again stresses your appreciation and esteem for this Apostolic See, I am very pleased to address my deferential and affectionate greetings to you, as well as my most cordial welcome.

2. Your presence here today reminds me of the Apostolic Visit I made to Venezuela in January 1985. It enabled me to come into contact with a noble, generous, welcoming and united people, spiritually motivated and stimulated by the evangelizing zeal of a Church committed to a national mission with the motto: "Venezuelan, renew your faith". This refers to supernatural faith, a gift of God for the life and salvation of believers. It is a faith that leads to trust in the human being and his dignity, and which encourages the promotion of justice, solidarity, brotherhood, love and peace.

3. Encouraged by my pastoral concern to serve the unity and charity of all the Churches, I have followed the moral and spiritual events of civil society in your country with interest. In the last few decades, Venezuela has known how to combine the reality of significant economic progress with the development of a programme of freedom in the framework of a constitutional state and a sound democratic system, with the traditional yearning to implement Simon Bolivar's commitment to America and his dream to build a great nation, "less because of its size and wealth than because of its freedom and glory" (cf. Letter from Kingston, 6 September 1915).

With regard to civil society it should be mentioned that in recent times a series of circumstances and changes have occurred which are important challenges for the future. Democracy has won on certain fronts, but some crucial issues still need to be addressed and can only be guaranteed by an internal renewal of democracy, through an honest and straightforward commitment to serve the common good of all citizens.

In this context, the sensitive, decisive and efficacious will to safeguard and encourage all human life, at its different stages and levels, deserves special attention as an unequivocal sign of effective humanization and genuine, overall development. This moral commitment is valid for everyone and, in particular, for States. It comes, for example, as a result of the dynamics and results of the Cairo Conference on Population and Development; it also fits in the context of what has been established by your country's Constitution and your generous and solemn acceptance, Mr. President, of my Letter to Heads of State regarding that Conference. In this respect, may I submit for your consideration the project I have proposed for an annual celebration of a Day for Life (cf. *Evangelium vitae*, n. 85).

It is just as important to stress the validity of the principle of the common good, with the double objective of serving each and every Venezuelan man and woman, and meeting their most basic needs, their noblest expectations, their loftiest personal and family aspirations on the one hand, and on the other, "to promote a human State" (*ibid.*, n. 101), that is, to draft and implement policies destined to combat extreme wretchedness and poverty until they are totally eradicated to overcome unemployment and social marginalization by the creation of work and a just distribution of wealth; to transform the enormous natural resources by honest hard work and creative ingenuity in science and technology, and in management and organization, without neglecting the requirements of a "human and 'social ecology' of work" (*Centesimus annus*, n. 38).

And I dare to add the promotion of private and public morality, the sustaining and raising of the ethical and spiritual level of persons and communities through an unambiguous personal and institutional witness; the encouraging of a thorough education in responsibility, service and training for a culture of life solidarity and love.

4. In order that the necessary material progress may truly be at the service of the whole person, special attention should be paid to the protection, development and reinforcement of the family as the first community, spiritual teacher and, for Christians, domestic church. The specific features of family life in Venezuela require an even broader and deeper collaboration between the different Government bodies and the Church, both for the satisfactory moral and spiritual formation of the younger generations, as well as for the authentic advancement of women, their personal qualities and sound social role.

5. Today more than ever, this integral human development requires painstaking attention to culture, especially with regard to the supreme spiritual values: truth, goodness and beauty.

Primarily, all projects which promote freedom, tolerance and effectiveness must be based on truth to give them a well founded, authentic and transcendent human orientation. Absorbing the best of modern development, this authentic humanization offers contemporary culture that "supplement of soul" which it urgently needs to counter certain inhuman and nihilistic tendencies of materialistic consumerism, individualistic hedonism and new totalitarian demands.

6. Mr. President, from its very origins as a nation the Republic of Venezuela has been deeply and closely tied to the Holy See. These bonds were particularly appreciated by its liberator, Simon Bolivar and were strengthened in recent decades with the 1964 Agreement. Certainly, the celebration of the beginning of the first evangelization, which began almost 500 years ago, will not only be an opportunity and reason for spiritual and moral renewal in the Church as a community of faith, but also for a more humanizing presence of Catholics in the national community's progress.

By dedicating themselves to the work of evangelization through their presence in institutions of education, social assistance, social advancement and the media the Bishops, priests religious communities and lay faithful are helping to improve the standards of Venezuelans in every way and safeguarding and promoting their best traditions and customs, their most genuine values, their most promising and hopeful plans. It is to be hoped, and I put deep trust in it, that the beatification of Mother Maria of St Joseph, an example of the work of evangelization which leads to holiness of life and therefore to an exemplary witness of service to the poorest, may be a pledge for the Catholic faithful of many, new vocations dedicated to the material and spiritual care of their fellow Venezuelans.

Mr. President, before coming to the end of this meeting, I would like to repeat my sincere appreciation of your visit. I am confident that your personal plans and commitments and those of your Government for free peaceful human development in justice and solidarity for the Venezuelan people will be effectively carried out. May the fact that your country is rooted in the principles of the Catholic faith, traditionally the religion of the majority, as well as in the teaching of the Church's social doctrine, which inspires the principles of the National Constitution, guarantee just development, respectful coexistence and the stability of its institutions.

Spiritually prostrate before the image of Our Lady of Coromoto, the patroness and spiritual guide of Venezuelans, I fervently ask the Almighty to shower abundant blessings and graces upon you, Mr. President, upon your family and co workers and upon each and every one of the beloved sons and daughters of the noble Venezuelan people.

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