



The Holy See

**DISCURSO DEL SANTO PADRE JUAN PABLO II
AL SEÑOR HERNANDO DURÁN DUSSÁN
NUEVO EMBAJADOR DE COLOMBIA ANTE LA SANTA SEDE***

Jueves 21 de marzo de 1991

1. Mister Ambassador,

It is a great pleasure for me to receive the Letters of Credence accrediting you as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Colombia to the Holy See. In bidding you a cordial welcome to this act of presentation, I want to assure you of my esteem in the fulfilment of the lofty mission which your Government has entrusted to you, and express to you the profound affection which I have for all the beloved sons and daughters of your country.

First of all, I want to reply to the sentiments of closeness and adhesion which the President of the Republic sent me through you and I ask you to be so kind as to express to him my deferential greeting and best wishes for peace and well-being.

2. You come to represent before the See of Peter a nation which, throughout its history, has been considered Catholic. No one can deny that the Catholic community of Colombia has been, from the very origins and outset of your nation – and it continues to be – a very important element for the good of society in general. As the Second Vatican Council said, «the Church, because of her universality, can be a very close bond between the various communities of men and nations, provided they have trust in the Church and guarantee her true freedom to carry out her mission» (Gaudium et Spes, 42). On the other hand, we cannot forget that many social problems including political ones have their roots in the moral order and it is in this field that the Church carries out her work of forming Christian consciences and criteria by inspiring people with transcendent values and most of all, as an evangelizer. The Colombian Catholics, who are for the most part faithful to the teachings of the Gospel and the Church's Magisterium should always promote and defend justice and peace freedom and uprightness, full respect for life from conception to its natural end. Therefore, the respectful and loyal collaboration and understanding between the Church and civil authority could only be for the good of the Colombian society.

3. The Church has no political ambitions. When she makes her specific contribution for the greatest, ever current problems of humanity, she does so in order to remain faithful to the mission her Founder entrusted to her. She does not present partial or transitory models of society, but is concerned about the conversion of hearts and minds so that people may discover and recognize in themselves the full truth of their humanity. And since her mission is moral and religious in nature, the Church respects the State's specific area of responsibility. At the same time, she encourages her members to accept their full responsibility as citizens so that, joining with others, they may contribute effectively to the common good and mankind's great causes.

4. In your words, Mister Ambassador, I heard you mention the plague of internal violence afflicting your country. Indeed frequent murders and crime are continuing to leave their wake of suffering and death in so many Colombian homes. With the deep sorrow caused in my fatherly heart by the repeated reprobate acts which claim so many innocent victims, I once again make my own the repeated calls of the bishops of your nation, who have not ceased denouncing and forcefully condemning terroristic and guerilla violence, torture and kidnapping the abuse of power and the impunity of certain crimes, the use of drugs and the abominable crime of drug trafficking. The unavoidable problems and challenges of the present moment are certainly obstacles which are difficult to overcome. However, they do not have to be reason for discouragement or despondency because Colombia can count on the wealth of its solid Christian values which must give it new impulse in the construction of a more just, fraternal and peaceful society.

5. I am following with special interest the important period your country is going through, where a process of constitutional reform is in progress. In this regard, I make my own the wishes expressed by the bishops' conference who in a recent joint document, expressed their desire for the care of the ethical principles which are the heritage of the Christian conscience of the Colombian people, «in such a way that they will open the way to a new and better society: a society that is more humane and Christian; more just and fraternal; more democratic and participative; freer and more responsible; where there is equality in diversity and the total common good is always promoted. A society which is ordered to the person and his or her good; a society in which the natural rights of the person and of all people are totally recognized and effectively guaranteed and promoted» (For a new social order with justice and solidarity, 22 February 1991).

Colombia is a nation with a recognized Catholic tradition. In this regard I want to recall that the first visit of a Pope to Latin America was to Bogota, when in 1968 my predecessor, Paul VI, was able to experience the Colombian faith. I also in July 1986, in my meetings with the various social and cultural groups of your country - with the children, young people adults and elderly - was able to experience the enthusiasm of so many people who openly manifested their religious convictions in those profound celebrations of faith and love.

6. Catholicism, in effect, is closely united to the history of your noble nation. In this regard, I am

pleased to know that each year the President of the Republic consecrates the Colombian nation to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, in recognition that the Christian faith proclaimed by the Catholic Church has been a basic element in Colombian society and the social order. I am likewise pleased to point out the fact that the great majority of the members of the Parliament have publicly manifested their Catholic convictions.

In this regard, a juridical order which properly safeguards the family will have positive repercussions on the common good, causing this institution to continue to be the nucleus upon which society is founded. The unity and indissolubility of marriage are also the guarantee of the stability and solidity of a nation's social life. In this regard I want to recall the teaching of the Second Vatican Council which taught that «civil authority should consider it a sacred duty to acknowledge the true nature of marriage and the family, to protect and foster them, to safeguard public morality and protect domestic prosperity» (Gaudium et Spes, 52).

In this context of contributing to the common good from a proper juridical order, we cannot fail to mention also the important role of the Catholic school which, from primary education to universities, has contributed so much to the formation of an upright civic conscience and the consolidation of Christian principles, always protecting the freedom and rights of other confessions.

In the exercise of their pastoral ministry the bishops of Colombia for their part have not ceased offering criteria and directives which can help the faithful better fulfil their civic responsibilities in this present period. Motivated by the desire to contribute to the common good and the better understanding among all the citizens and public authorities, they emphasized in a recent joint document that «the recognition and protection of the needs of the moral order - natural and Christian - would be an effective factor for the construction of a just, participative, solidary and democratic society» (Pastoral exhortation concerning the National Parliamentary Assembly, 22 February 1991).

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That these sentiments may be a comforting reality in your country, through the intercession of Our Lady of Chiquinquirá, I implore for the beloved Colombian people, their Government, and especially for Your Excellency and your family and collaborators, the constant divine protection.

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