



The Holy See

***DISCURSO DEL SANTO PADRE JUAN PABLO II
AL SEÑOR PEDRO LÓPEZ AGUIRREBENGOA,
NUEVO EMBAJADOR DE ESPAÑA ANTE LA SANTA SEDE****

Sábado 28 de noviembre de 1992

Mr. Ambassador,

It gives me particular pleasure to receive the Letter accrediting you as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Spain to the Holy See.

I greatly appreciate the kind words which you expressed to me, and in particular the deferential greeting of His Majesty the King, as well as of the President of the Government, and I ask you please to express to them my best wishes for peace and prosperity, as well as for the prosperity and spiritual welfare of the beloved Spanish nation.

1. Your words, Mr. Ambassador, were particularly pleasing to me and made me recall the pastoral visits I have made to your country, during which I was able to appreciate the most genuine values of the Spanish soul: its unblemished piety, human warmth, hospitality, tenacity in the face of difficulties, and the aspirations for greater justice and fraternity which come from a people formed in the shadow of the cross of Christ and in the heart of the Catholic Church.

How could I not recall with gratitude and admiration, during this year of the fifth centenary, the impressive work of evangelization accomplished by so many of Spain's sons and daughters, who with unlimited generosity planted the Church in America? The commemoration of this glorious fact was the main reason for my recent Pastoral Visit to the Dominican Republic where I had the joy of inaugurating the Fourth General Conference of the Latin American Episcopate, during which I wanted to give fervent «thanks to God for the band of evangelizers who left their country and gave

their life to sow the new life of faith, hope and love in the New World» (Address in Santo Domingo 12 October 1992, n. 3).

Those self-sacrificing missionaries, at the same time, were the determined defenders of the Indios and, in addition to the precious gift of faith, brought them the inestimable treasures of culture and art, the effects of which are still alive in the peoples of America. Through these evangelizers Spain opened the new world to the principles of the right of peoples expressed by the famous School of Salamanca and put into effect a set of laws by which the Crown sought to respond to the sincere desire of Queen Isabella of Castille that «her children» the Indios, as she called them, would be recognized and treated as human beings, with the dignity of the children of God and a free people, on a par with the other citizens of her realms.

2. It gives me great pleasure to see that this year's celebrations are helping significantly to strengthen Spain and Portugal's bonds with the nations of America; furthermore, new and closer relations of affection and mutual knowledge have been created between those same Churches and those on the other shore.

The Apostolic See's recognition of the work of evangelization which Spain accomplished in America beginning in 1492 was also manifested through the Holy See's presence at the Universal Exposition in Seville its pavilion offered the many people who visited it a variety of documents and artistic works which showed what can rightly be called a «spiritual cross-breeding» because of the intimate interpenetration of indigenous cultural expressions with the contents of the Christian faith.

Also within the context of the fifth centenary, we must mention the international Marian and Mariological congresses celebrated last September in Huelva, the place from which the three caravels of the explorers set sail. They were meant to shed particular light on the primary place which Marian devotion occupied in the whole work of evangelization. In addition to this, with God's help, this coming spring I hope to be able solemnly to close the International Eucharistic Congress in Seville, a city which played such a decisive role in the American venture.

3. As Your Excellency has noted, in our day we are witnessing profound changes which to no small degree cause a sense of uncertainty and which demand of everyone a particular effort for moral rearmament. Indeed, we need only look around us to see the value crisis which is found in so many areas of the life of individuals and society today, and which particularly affects institutions such as the family or broad areas of the population, such as young people. How could we fail to mention once again a word of reproof for practices which violate the right to life of the unborn? For all these reasons it is necessary that Spanish Catholics be more acutely aware of their own responsibilities and, vis-à-vis God and their Christian duties, seek to build a more just, fraternal and welcoming society based on the moral principles which have inspired its path throughout history. Determined to overcome the divisions of the past they must inspire ever greater solidarity among all citizens, which will lead people to undertake a wide-ranging, vigorous involvement for

the common good in fraternity and harmony. In this context I cannot fail to mention my firm condemnation of terrorism, which violates the most sacred rights of the person, harms peaceful coexistence and offends the Christian sentiment of your people.

4. The Church in Spain, faithful to the demands of the Gospel, reaffirms her vocation to serve the great causes of the human person, a citizen and child of God. Therefore, she expresses anew her desire to continue to cooperate, in mutual respect and freedom, with the country's authorities and various bodies, in order to promote everything that can foster the greater good of the human person and of social groups, especially the least favoured. In this regard, the agreements signed between the Church and the Spanish State offer a valid platform for working at the service of all citizens. For our part, we hope that, by combining a formal respect for the letter of the agreements with a mutual attitude of cordiality and goodwill, decisive progress will be made towards improving these relations bringing elements of harmony to bear on such important points as legislation affecting education and instruction. The Catholic Church, which has no reservation in accepting democratic coexistence and, as a consequence, a plurality of content according to the educational model freely chosen by parents, considers it the family's inalienable right not to encounter legal or economic obstacles in the exercise of this basic human and social right recognized today in international accords. For their part, «the Episcopal Conference and other institutions of the Spanish Church have repeatedly expressed the desire for a new educational system which would fully respect the rights of students and their parents in this regard, always at the service of all Spaniards, and “not subject to fluctuations of political changes”» (Address to the Spanish Bishops on their ad limina visit Rome 16 December 1991, n. 8).

5. The deterioration of ethical behaviour which we are witnessing today, Mr. Ambassador, makes it urgently necessary for everyone to work towards drawing up and applying educational programmes which will check the excessive pressure on children and young people, instilling in their consciences sentiments of honour, solidarity and justice, firmly based on a religious and transcendental view of life. In this regard, as I noted to the Spanish Bishops during their last ad limina visit, «one cannot forget that in the exercise of their freedom citizens also have the right to be respected in their moral and religious convictions and that to this end, the means of social communication are at the service of the common good» (11 November 1991). The same Christian principles which have imbued the life of the Spanish nation since its origins must instil firm hope and a new dynamism which can give a renewed impetus to a society in which honesty, industriousness, and a spirit of solidarity and participation reign at all levels.

Mr. Ambassador, in expressing to you again my best wishes for the success of the lofty mission which you begin today, I assure you of my prayer to the Almighty that He may always help with his gifts you and your distinguished family, your co-workers, those who govern your noble country, as well as the beloved Spanish people, whom I always remember with particular affection.

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