



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS
POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO H.E. Mr CÉSAR IVÁN FERIS IGLESIAS,
AMBASSADOR OF THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC TO THE HOLY SEE***

Monday, 26 May 1997

Mr Ambassador,

1. I welcome you with great joy on the solemn occasion of the presentation of the Letters of Credence accrediting you as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Dominican Republic to the Holy See, and I sincerely thank you for the friendly words you have chosen to address to me.

I would first of all like to reciprocate the respectful greeting which Dr Leonel Fernández Reyna, President of the Republic, has expressed to me through you. Please be kind enough to convey my very best wishes to him for the success of his mandate.

2. Your Excellency represents a nation which has many links with the Catholic Church and with this Apostolic See. The Dominican Republic has a mark of honour in the fact that, at the beginning of the evangelization of the American continent, the first Mass was celebrated in this land — as I recalled last year — and the first indigenous Baptisms in the New World were administered there. Today, faithful to the demands of the Gospel and with due respect for legitimate pluralism, the Church in this country reaffirms her vocation of service to the great causes of man as a citizen and a son of God. In this regard, Christian principles constitute a solid hope and give society a new energy so that at all levels hard work, honesty and a spirit of sharing may prevail.

3. Moreover, the Holy See is pleased with the good relations between Church and State and fervently hopes that they will continue to grow in the future. Both have a common subject, the human person who, as a citizen, is a member of the State and, as a baptized person, is a member

of the Catholic Church. In fact, there is a broad area where the proper competence and actions of Church and State converge and are interrelated. Thus there is no question of claiming privileges for the Church, but rather of ordering their mutual relations for the citizens' benefit.

In this way the Church can fulfil her mission of evangelization and human advancement. She wants only to be able to continue her mission of service with renewed vigour, motherly concern and constant creativity. This is why it is necessary to take into account her activities in pastoral movements and in the areas of health care and Catholic schools, which rightly deserve recognition and support from the State.

4. Many parts of the world are undergoing a crisis of values that affects institutions such as the family, and broad sectors of the population such as youth and the complex world of work. In this regard it is urgent that Dominicans become more aware of their own responsibilities and, with respect to God and their duties as citizens, that they strive to continue building a more just, fraternal and welcoming society. To do so, the Christian concept of life and the Church's moral teaching offer values that must be taken into consideration by those who work in service to the nation.

First of all, it must be remembered that the human being is the primary subject of development. Although in the past this idea was thought of in exclusively economic terms, today it is obvious that the development of persons and peoples must be integral, that is to say, social development must be mindful of their political, economic, ethical and spiritual dimensions.

5. A current and crucial problem, which is very concrete in Latin America, is that of the great social inequality between rich and poor. It should not be forgotten that economic imbalances contribute to the gradual deterioration and loss of moral values, which frequently lead to the break-up of families, to permissiveness and to scant respect for life.

In this regard, it is urgent to consider as priorities the recovery of these values by political and social measures which promote dignified and stable employment for all, so that the material poverty which affects many of the inhabitants is overcome, the family institution strengthened and access to education for all the members of the population encouraged. For this reason it is necessary to dedicate special care to teaching true moral and spiritual values, through educational programmes that spread these basic values in a society that, like yours, is rooted in Christian principles. For this reason, the various public institutions are responsible for intervening on behalf of the family and, in matters concerning demographic trends, should have no recourse to methods that do not respect the dignity of the person and his fundamental rights.

In the world today it is not enough to limit oneself to the laws of the market and its globalization; solidarity should also be fostered. It is therefore necessary to promote equitable development. In this respect I wrote in the Encyclical *Centesimus annus* that "God gave the earth to the whole

human race for the sustenance of all its members, without excluding or favouring anyone” (n. 31). This is why a form of development that fails to keep these inequalities in mind and does not resolutely deal with them can never prosper in any way.

At the same time, there is a growing awareness of the need to harmonize economic and social policies. There is no future for those who, by exclusively seeking economic results, marginalize social life, or those who advance social policies that are neither realistic nor sustainable. With the daily experience of thousands of institutions linked to the Catholic Church, it can be said that balanced development oriented to the common good will be authentic and will contribute in the long term to social stability. Thus a society that is not anchored in sound ethical values tends to drift, in the absence of the essential basis on which the desired social development must be built if it is to endure.

6. Social integration is only possible if the public overcomes its lack of confidence in the administration of justice, in the forces of order and in the political representatives of the people. Nothing precipitates the disintegration of a society more than corruption and its impunity. That is why efforts for authentic social development need to reinforce democratic values and universal respect for human rights — inherent in every human being by the mere fact that he is a person — and the proper functioning of the constitutional State.

The family must be strengthened by seeking to preserve and encourage the rights, abilities and obligations of its members. Particular attention must therefore be paid to the most vulnerable social groups because of their specific needs or the discrimination they suffer. On the one hand, women — especially those who have responsibility for the home — the elderly and children. On the other, the handicapped, AIDS patients, the indigenous peoples and other ethnic minorities, emigrants and refugees. In this respect the Catholic Church’s institutions are making a significant contribution to the common effort to promote a society that is more just and attentive to the needs of its weaker members.

7. Mr Ambassador, before I bring this meeting to a close, I would like to express my best wishes to you that the mission you are beginning today may be abundantly fruitful. I ask you once again to convey my sentiments and hopes to the authorities of your country, as I invoke God’s blessing upon you, your distinguished family, your coworkers and all the beloved children of the noble Dominican nation.

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