



The Holy See

***DISCURSO DEL PAPA JUAN PABLO II
AL NUEVO EMBAJADOR DE COLOMBIA ANTE LA SANTA SEDE
JULIO CÉSAR TURBAY AYALA****

Lunes 19 de diciembre de 1994

Mr. Ambassador,

1. I am very pleased today to receive the Letters of Credence you have presented to me after being appointed Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Colombia to the Holy See. As I offer you a cordial welcome, I would also like to express my gratitude to you for your courteous words which confirm the noble sentiments of closeness and loyalty to the Chair of Peter, present in the hearts of many citizens of the Colombian nation. I am likewise particularly grateful to you for the respectful greetings you bring me from Dr Ernesto Samper Pizano, President of the Republic, to whom I return my very best wishes and the assurance of my prayers for the prosperity and spiritual well-being of all the children of this beloved country.

Your presence here on this solemn occasion vividly reminds me of the unforgettable celebrations at which I had the joy to preside during my Pastoral Visit in 1986. On that memorable occasion, I was able to observe how the principles and values which emanate from the Gospel have penetrated Colombia's history and culture, for the great and noble-hearted Colombians have always shown openness to the Church's mission.

2. Peace, as Your Excellency has said, is your people's great aspiration at this time when social coexistence is sometimes disrupted by an almost endemic violence and by the drug trade, which is relentlessly claiming so many lives. The Government which you represent has shown its intention to encourage an alternative model of development. For this reason, it will be necessary to make the various national policies coincide with ethical principles, moreover, development is not only the result of planning and economic policy, but also the fruit of the will and the joint effort to serve the common good. These conditions, indispensable if this objective is to be reached, are

based on an education that fosters respect for the life and dignity of the human person, just as certain political directives assure social coexistence, the right to work and above all, promote justice and peace, values postulated in the Preamble to the new Colombian Constitution. In this way, citizens can be asked to make their own the indisputable values such as truth, freedom, mutual understanding and solidarity.

In this regard, I am pleased to recall that this aspiration reaches its fulfilment when God is placed at the centre of life and human history and when culture deriving from this is rooted in «the moral sense, which is in turn rooted and fulfilled in the religious sense» (*Veritatis splendor*, n. 98).

3. A comprehensive view of man leads to reaffirming the irreplaceable role which must be played by the family, whose deep identity must be safeguarded and accepted as a «firmly grounded social reality» and «in a way entirely its own, a sovereign society». In fact the family unit should be at the service of a fully human life and should be the basis of social harmony. This year, which the Church has celebrated as the Year of the Family, I have recalled that «no human society can run the risk of permissiveness in fundamental issues regarding the nature of marriage and the family! Such moral permissiveness cannot fail to damage the authentic requirements of peace and communion among people. It is thus quite understandable why the Church vigorously defends the identity of the family and encourages responsible individuals and institutions, especially political leaders and international organizations, not to yield to the temptation of a superficial and false modernity» (*ibid.*, n. 17).

In this sense, the Church fulfils her mission in the areas which belong to her, enlightening with spiritual and moral principles the environments which contribute to the common good. By preaching the Word of God and by her teaching in the social context, she is willing to continue to collaborate with the various public institutions, so that your nation's citizens may find satisfactory responses to their needs of the present time.

4. To achieve this mutual collaboration, a Concordat was negotiated between the Holy See and your country. I have been concerned to observe that there has been widespread criticism of the value of the agreed norms, but your Government's determination, shared by the Holy See, to find a satisfactory solution to the problems which have emerged in this context, especially over the past few years, has always given cause for hope. There is no doubt about the desirability of having a legal framework that defines the exercise of religious freedom, a right of individuals, which «must also be accorded to men when they act in community» (*Dignitatis humanae*, n. 4). In addition the State and the Church are thus offered a means to collaborate for the common good.

The Church neither seeks nor demands privileges. She only asks that the necessary conditions which ensure individuals their natural rights be recognized, so that she may fulfil her role and enable individuals and peoples to exercise the inalienable right to freedom, especially religious freedom, and to seek the truth, in accordance with the dictates of each one's conscience. Each

State for its part, must set a high ethical standard as a reference to guide its policy both for the genuine development of the national community and in international relations. This is why the Holy See deems it mutually beneficial to reinforce and to regulate its relations with States.

Mr Ambassador, your presence and your words demonstrate the respect for and appreciation of the Church's specific mission in this nation which, amidst the many complex challenges, teaches and works under the wise and prudent guidance of her Pastors, so that the moral values and Christian concept of life may be an inspiration to all those who in one way or another, are doing their utmost to safeguard the dignity and cause of man, who is «the primary and fundamental way for the Church» (Redemptor hominis, n. 14).

At the time you are entering the high office which has been assigned to you, I would like to offer you my best wishes for the happy and successful outcome of your mission to this Apostolic See which desires to preserve and strengthen its good relations with Colombia. As I ask you to convey to the President of the Republic, your Government, the authorities and the beloved Colombian people, my sentiments and hopes, I assure you of my prayers to the Almighty that through the intercession of Our Lady of Chiquinquirá, his gifts may always accompany you and your distinguished family, your colleagues, and the Government leaders and citizens of your noble country, which I remember with special affection.

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