



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO H.E. MR IVÁN GUILLERMO RINCÓN URDANETA
AMBASSADOR OF THE BOLIVARIAN REPUBLIC
OF VENEZUELA TO THE HOLY SEE****

Thursday 25 August 2005

Mr Ambassador,

I am pleased to receive the Letters accrediting you as Ambassador of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to the Holy See. The occasion also affords me a happy opportunity to offer you my most cordial welcome as you are assuming the duties assigned to you by your Government.

I would also like to express to you my sincere appreciation for your kind words, and for the respectful greeting from President Hugo Rafael Chávez Frías which you, as his spokesman, have conveyed to me. I ask you to reciprocate, expressing my appreciation to him together with my sincere sentiments of closeness and affection for the Venezuelan People. I pray to the Almighty for them that they will persevere today, in their social and economic life, in seeking the most suitable solutions to attain ever higher goals of justice, solidarity and progress, in accordance with the Christian spirit that has contributed so much to forging their national identity.

Your Country, as you mentioned, has an ancient and deep Catholic tradition - as the liberator Simón Bolívar emphasized - and it is characterized by profound esteem and veneration for the Successor of Peter. Thus, one can hardly be surprised by the prominence that the Government gave to mourning the death of my venerable Predecessor, Pope John Paul II, and the delegations it sent to his funeral and to the solemn inauguration of my own Pontificate.

For its part, the Holy See follows the events of this "land of grace" very closely, as it has shown on numerous occasions.

For all these reasons, I express my best wishes to you that during the exercise of your important mission, the former traditional and historical relations between Venezuela and the Holy See will be reinforced in a spirit of loyal and constructive collaboration.

Venezuela has been wonderfully endowed by the Creator with natural resources. This brings with it the responsibility to cultivate and care for the gifts received (cf. Gn 2: 15), so that all its inhabitants may have the possibility of living with the dignity that befits human beings.

In this task, no one may feel exempt from active collaboration, especially in cases of poverty or social marginalization. The Church's constant work in Venezuela, which she has sometimes had to carry out with very limited human and material means, has focused on many activities of human advancement, promoting life from its conception and the family, and on projects of social assistance in order to strengthen fundamental social institutions such as education, medical aid and charitable structures. The Church has done this both in the urban context, with considerable action among the poorest of the poor, as well as in the more geographically remote areas of the Nation, among the indigenous populations.

The Church's educational action and social assistance, therefore, continue to benefit the whole of society. This is particularly evident in the case of Catholic schools, which have always made and continue to make an enormous contribution to the education of Venezuelan children and young people, inspiring the human and spiritual values in them, in accordance with the desires and the free choice of the parents. Parents are the first educators of their children and enjoy the natural and legal right to choose the kind of education they desire for them.

In this regard, I am aware of the importance that the Venezuelan public Authorities attach to these areas, which are vital for the harmonious development of the Country, through its various programmes for literacy, education and health-care training. These activities require a generous and concerted contribution on behalf of all citizens and various institutions in order to foster widespread attitudes of solidarity which, together with a fairer and more balanced social order, will be the best guarantee of lasting results and not end up being partial or transient.

Thus, loyal and respectful dialogue between all the social parties is indispensable as a means for agreement on aspects that concern the common good.

The Catholic Church, which has been present and has accompanied the Venezuelan People through all the stages of its history, currently shares Venezuela's worries and hopes for a better future.

In fulfilling her proper mission, the Church announces the Gospel and proclaims forgiveness and reconciliation. Sincerely offered and received, this is the only way to achieve a harmony that endures and to prevent legitimate discrepancies from degenerating into aggressive confrontations.

She invites people to nurture the basic values of every society, such as love of truth, respect for justice, honesty in carrying out one's responsibilities and generous readiness to serve the good of all the citizens before partisan interests.

Moreover, it is well known that the social situation does not improve with the application of technological means alone; it is also necessary to pay special attention to promoting values, with respect for the ethical dimension proper to the person, the family and social life. In this way it will be easier to assure the integral development of all members of the national community based on respect for their fundamental rights and freedoms, as is proper for a State of rights.

The Church cannot cease to proclaim and defend the dignity of the human person in his or her full integrity and openness to divine transcendence. She asks to have constantly at her disposal the indispensable space and necessary means to carry out her mission and her humanizing service.

In this regard, and with respect for the specific competencies of the Church and the State, there are many areas in which it would be desirable to establish various forms of fruitful collaboration between them. This would enable them to render a better service to the people's development and to foster a spirit of coexistence in freedom and solidarity that would be beneficial to all.

Mr Ambassador, you recalled the unquestionable value of freedom, a great good that enables human beings to fulfil themselves totally. The Church needs this freedom to exercise her mission, to choose her Pastors and to guide her faithful. The Successors of Peter have always striven to defend this freedom. Moreover, State Governments need have no fears regarding the Church's action, for in exercising her freedom she seeks only to carry out her religious mission and to contribute to the spiritual progress of each country.

At the beginning of the year, John Paul II affirmed in his Address to the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See: "There need be no fear that legitimate religious freedom would limit other freedoms or be injurious to the life of civil society. On the contrary: together with religious freedom, all other freedoms develop and thrive, inasmuch as freedom is an indivisible good, the prerogative of the human person and his dignity...."

"The Church is able carefully to distinguish, as she must, what belongs to Caesar from what belongs to God (cf. Mt 22: 21). She actively cooperates in promoting the common good of society, inasmuch as she repudiates falsehood and educates to truth, she condemns hatred and contempt, and she calls for a spirit of brotherhood; always and everywhere she encourages - as history clearly shows - works of charity, science and the arts. She asks only for freedom, so that she can effectively cooperate with all public and private institutions concerned with the good of mankind" (*Address to Diplomats Accredited to the Holy See*, 10 January 2005, n. 8; *L'Osservatore Romano* English edition, 12 January 2005, p. 3).

In making these words my own, I deeply hope that the current difficulties in Church-State relations dissipate and that a fruitful collaboration in continuity with the noble Venezuelan tradition will be restored.

Mr Ambassador, at the end of this meeting, I once again express to you my cordial greetings and welcome, together with my very best wishes for the accomplishment of the lofty mission you have begun. I earnestly hope that Venezuela's relations with the Holy See will be strengthened and improved. You can count on the acceptance and support necessary to make this important goal a reality.

I also hope that your stay in Rome will be an enrichment to you and your family, and that it will thereby contribute to increasing the sensitivity of many Venezuelans, who deeply love their Homeland and who, at the same time, can also feel like citizens of the world and much loved children of the Church.

I entrust all these sentiments and hopes to Our Lady of Coromoto, whom I fervently invoke so that she may intercede with her divine Son for the Venezuelan People, upon whom I implore an abundance of Blessings from the Most High.

**L'Osservatore Romano* n. 36 pp. 3, 4.

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