



# The Holy See

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**ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER  
TO THE AMBASSADOR OF CUBA ACCREDITED  
TO THE HOLY SEE ON THE OCCASION OF THE  
PRESENTATION OF THE CREDENTIALS\***

Thursday 2 December 1999

*Mr Ambassador,*

1. I am pleased to welcome you and to receive the Letters of Credence appointing you as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Cuba to the Holy See. I thank you for your kind words, as well as for the cordial greetings you have brought me from Dr Fidel Castro, President of the Council of State and of the Government of the Republic of Cuba, to whom I ask you to convey my best wishes for peace and well-being, and the material and spiritual progress of the beloved Cuban nation.

2. In your address you referred to the attention your Government is paying in a systematic way to the fields of health care and education, achieving praiseworthy levels. You also pointed out the hospitable spirit of the Cuban people and their constant desire for freedom, two aspects in keeping with a nation's identity and which should be encouraged with determination. In this regard, an indispensable task is to spread these values and to protect citizens from any form of corruption or from certain social scourges that, since they threaten social peace and stability, affect young people in particular.

For a society like Cuba's, which has distinguished itself by achieving a considerable level of education, it is important to have an atmosphere of trust and reduced tension in which people's fundamental rights are safeguarded, whether or not they are believers, and conditions created in which they can exercise "fully their own judgement and a responsible freedom in their actions, and not be subject to the pressure of coercion but be inspired by a sense of duty" (*Declaration Dignitatis humanae*, n. 1). This climate is also essential if they are to acquire credibility on the

international scene.

3. In addition, material and moral poverty can be caused by unjust inequalities, by the restriction of fundamental freedoms, by the depersonalization and alienation of individuals (cf. *Departure address*, José Martí Airport, Havana, n. 4). However, to be able to walk together, in just and respectful solidarity, as I said as soon as I arrived on Cuban soil, the world must be generously and effectively open to Cuba, and Cuba must open itself to the world, since it is called to play an important role in the journey towards a world that is more human, fraternal and respectful of the human person's dignity. This is why I fervently hope that your beloved nation will continue its efforts to build justice and peace within the framework of a respectful and untiring dialogue.

On the other hand, we know that we live in an era of continual global exchanges in which no nation can survive in isolation. And Cuba must not find itself deprived of ties with other peoples, since they are indispensable to sound economic, social and cultural development. In this regard, it is to be hoped that Cuba will find in the international community the support and financial aid it needs to meet the needs of the present moment. This path would be facilitated if, in turn, Cuba were to encourage new areas of freedom and participation for its inhabitants, who are all called to join forces in building society.

4. Mr Ambassador, during my Pastoral Visit at the beginning of 1998 to your country, the beautiful island known as the "Pearl of the Caribbean" and the "Gateway to the Gulf", I could feel the spirit of hard work and initiative which characterizes the Cuban people. Also, although the Church in Cuba is poor and priests are scarce, she shares this same spirit and wants to make her specific contribution to an ever greater strengthening of morality and society. She wants above all to be a messenger of love, justice, reconciliation and peace, offering everyone the message of Jesus, the Good News, in a context of true religious freedom (cf. *Dignitatis humanae*, n. 13). For this to occur, further encouragement must be given to constructive and continual dialogue, of which you have already had considerable experience through the tasks you have performed in recent years.

This dialogue will enable the Church to carry out her own role without privileges or favouritism but, on the contrary, by making use of the means indispensable to her daily work so that, Christians, like other citizens, may enjoy the "civil right of freedom from interference in leading their lives according to their conscience" (ibid.).

In addition, I know that your country is courageously facing the current economic situation. On several occasions I have referred to similar situations which, on a global scale, present many problems and prevent so many countries from achieving desirable levels of prosperity. In this regard, I would like to reaffirm what I said in my Apostolic Letter *Tertio millennio adveniente*, in the hope of encouraging appropriate development for all (cf. n. 51).

5. The Church in Cuba also hopes for even more generous openness to the solidarity shown by

the universal Church - through an enriching exchange of personnel and resources - with a true sense of collaboration and respect for what is particular to Cuban culture, within Latin American culture, with its Christian soul that gives it a universal vocation (cf. *Homily in Revolution Square*, n. 7; Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in America*, n. 14).

In your address, Your Excellency, you also referred to Church-State relations in Cuba, which must be maintained with mutual respect and cordiality: respect in order not to interfere in what is proper to each institution, but which, on the Church's part, is aimed at collaboration in achieving greater well-being for the national community. Therefore it is possible through constructive dialogue to promote the fundamental values for the ordering and development of society. In this regard, although the Church's role is spiritual and not political, the fostering of more flexible relations between Church and State will certainly contribute to the harmony, progress and welfare of all, without distinction.

In this regard, it is fundamental to have a correct idea of the relationship between the political community and the Church, and to distinguish clearly between actions which the faithful, individually or in groups, take in their personal capacity as citizens in accordance with their Christian conscience, and their actions on behalf of the Church in communion with her Pastors. "The Church, which in virtue of her office and competence, can in no way be confused with the political community nor be tied to any political system, is both a sign and safeguard of the transcendent character of the human person" (*Ecclesia in America*, n. 27).

For its part, this Apostolic See will continue to raise its voice in defence of fairness and peaceful coexistence among nations and peoples, while safeguarding their autonomy, so that the Cuban people, like any person or nation that seeks the truth, works to make progress and longs for concord and peace, may look to the future with hope (*Arrival speech*, José Martí Airport, Havana, n. 5).

6. Today's ceremony, which is being held only a few days before the opening of the Great Jubilee in which we will celebrate the 2,000th anniversary of the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem, prompts me to recall what I proclaimed with all my strength at the beginning of my Pontificate: "Do not be afraid. Open wide the doors to Christ. To his saving power open the boundaries of States, economic and political systems, the vast fields of culture, civilization and development. Christ knows 'what is in man'. He alone knows it" (22 October 1978). And today, at the very end of this century and millennium, I consider it my duty to add: May no one, no institution, no ideology, set obstacles in anyone's way to prevent him from being open to Christ! This is my greatest desire for all the citizens of beloved Cuba. I recall it as I think back to the unforgettable days of my Pastoral Visit, when I had the opportunity to experience the human warmth of the wonderful Cuban people.

7. As you begin the high office to which you have been appointed, I would like to express my best wishes to you for the successful and fruitful fulfilment of your mission to this Apostolic See. As I

ask you kindly to convey these sentiments to the President of the Council of State and of the Government of this Republic, to the other authorities and to the noble Cuban people, I assure you of my prayers to the Almighty that with his gifts he will always help you and your distinguished family, your staff and the whole nation, which I always recall with special affection.

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