



# The Holy See

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## **ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER TO THE NEW AMBASSADOR OF PARAGUAY TO THE HOLY SEE\***

*Friday 17 December 1999*

*Madam Ambassador,*

1. I am particularly pleased to welcome you and to receive the Letters accrediting you as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Paraguay to the Holy See. I warmly thank you for your kind words and especially for the respectful greeting of the President of the Republic, Dr Luis Angel Macchi, to whom I ask you to convey my best wishes for peace and well-being, and for the prosperity and overall progress of the beloved Paraguayan nation.

2. You have come here to represent a nation which, in the year now ending, has experienced some very important events in a socio-economic and political situation which at times has been difficult and has included some critical episodes. Nevertheless, in the midst of this experience, the conscience of citizens has been aroused and they wish to improve the conditions of society without giving in to despair or fatalism. In these circumstances, high hopes have been placed in the Government of National Unity; they are a great responsibility and they challenge its creative capacity to build a more harmonious society based on truth, justice and solidarity. To achieve this it will be necessary to eradicate civil strife and to avoid a lack of political will, which would thwart the efforts to build a better future for everyone.

I would therefore like to encourage the political authorities responsible for leading Paraguayan society on its way to the threshold of the third millennium to be ever attentive to the legitimate cries and noblest aspirations of all the citizens. It will constantly spur them in the tireless struggle to improve the living conditions of the most disadvantaged, to check the corruption of the powerful at the expense of the weak, and to prevent the gradual impoverishment of large sectors of the population. Moreover, the lack of trust in democratic institutions will be combatted, a phenomenon that involves incalculable risks, and a social order will be fostered in which all citizens can

participate in political decisions and have the possibility of electing their leaders and calling them to account.

3. Nevertheless, the common good of a people does not depend solely on the formal aspects of its political organization but on its fundamental decision to adhere to the profound truth of the human being and his social dimension. In this regard, I stated in my Encyclical *Centesimus annus* that, "as history demonstrates, a democracy without values easily turns into open or thinly disguised totalitarianism" (n. 46), since, if there is no ultimate truth to guide and direct political activity, human "ideas and convictions can easily be manipulated for reasons of power" (ibid.).

Basic human rights are at the very heart of the values that an authentic democratic system must protect and promote. The Holy See has spared no effort in encouraging the defence and promotion of these rights, in particular the right to life and respect for it from conception to its natural end, as well as of the rights and advancement of families, women, workers, indigenous peoples, migrants, the elderly and children. This is a noble cause to which the Church is firmly committed also in international forums, joining forces when possible with those of men and women of good will, in order to build a civilization of love and solidarity that can overcome old barriers, narrow horizons and bygone ideologies.

Paraguay, a fertile land, as you have so beautifully described it, both for the human qualities of its people and for its refined piety and tenacious struggle for national freedom and autonomy, combines all the necessary requirements for building "oñondivepa" - "all together" in the Guaraní language - that new civilization which can transform the country into a people of brothers and sisters.

4. This meeting to welcome you, Madam Ambassador, gives me the pleasure of recalling the Pastoral Visit I had the joy of making to your country in 1988. I was able to note at the time how the Catholic Church carries out her mission of proclaiming the Good News of Jesus Christ to the men and women of Paraguay, a land in which from the beginning of the evangelization of the American continent the Christian faith has sunk deep roots and has continued to mould the traditions and customs of its inhabitants.

The Pastors of the Church in Paraguay, who have always shared the lot of their faithful and are aware of their responsibility to shed the light of the Gospel and the Church's social teaching on every situation in their history, have not ceased to make their voice heard in moments of difficulty, anguish, collapse of values and moral confusion. Without doubt this has helped the Church's reputation as one of the most credible institutions worthy of the citizens' overall trust.

This is an important aspect of her service to the People of God. Therefore, the Church shuns every privilege and proclaims her right to have a place in the social fabric with her own structures and means, since she considers that her contribution to the good of the community as a whole

cannot be disregarded or relegated to the private sector, as advocated by certain currents of thought in vogue today. As I said during my above-mentioned visit to Paraguay: "The Church cannot be confined to her temples, nor is it possible to relegate God to a corner in human consciences" (*Address to the Authorities and the Diplomatic Corps*, 16 May 1988, n. 2). In fact, the proclamation of the Gospel would not be completely faithful were it to exclude any essential dimension of the human being, such as life in society and the need to build a more just, fraternal and harmonious society for everyone. The Church, the Second Vatican Council said, does not only communicate divine life to men, but in a certain sense she casts its light over the world; she "heals and elevates the dignity of the human person, consolidates society and endows the daily activity of men with a deeper sense and meaning" (*Gaudium et spes*, n. 40).

5. At the end of this address, Madam Ambassador, may I offer you my best wishes that you will have a pleasant stay in Rome and that your mission of serving the relations between your country and the Holy See will yield abundant fruits of mutual understanding and close collaboration, increasing the good diplomatic relations that already exist.

Together with these wishes, which I extend to your distinguished family and to your staff, I ask you to convey my cordial greetings to the Government of Paraguay and especially to your President, and to express my affection and closeness to the Paraguayan people, upon whom I invoke the motherly protection of Our Lady of Caacupé and whom I cordially bless.

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