



The Holy See

***DISCORSO DI GIOVANNI PAOLO II
A S.E. IL SIGNOR HERMES HERRERA HERNÁNDEZ,
NUOVO AMBASCIATORE DI CUBA PRESSO LA SANTA SEDE****

Lunedì, 2 marzo 1992

Mr. Ambassador,

I thank you for the kind words you addressed to me in presenting the Letters of Credence accrediting you as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Cuba to the Holy See. I would like to give you a most cordial welcome while expressing my best wishes for the success of the lofty mission which your Government has entrusted to you.

1. You mentioned the supreme good of peace and brotherhood among nations. In this regard, I can assure you that the Holy See will tirelessly continue in its commitment to construct a more just order which will make our world a place that is more human, fraternal and welcoming. Indeed, the Church is devoted to this noble cause out of an obligation of fidelity to her vocation to serve all people, which allows her to fulfil her ministry above and beyond earthly motivations or partisan interests, as the Second Vatican Council teaches: «By her nature and mission the Church is universal in that she is not committed to any one culture or to any political, economic or social system. Hence she can be a very close bond between the various communities of people and nations, provided they have trust in the Church and guarantee her freedom to carry out her mission» (Gaudium et spes, n. 42).

However, in the fulfilment of this mission, which is primarily religious and moral in nature, she cannot prescind from the concrete person and his or her environment because it is the human person, in his or her historical existence, to whom the Gospel is addressed. Therefore, as she journeys towards the heavenly city, the Church, «pillar and foundation of truth» (1 Tim 3:15), cannot neglect the earthly city; rather, faithful to the supreme commandment of love, she tirelessly

preaches the brotherhood of all people, whose legitimate interests she defends in the name of truth and justice.

2. In this she is motivated by her consciousness of the dignity of the human person, created in God's image and likeness (cf. Gn 1:27). Therefore any violation of human beings in their physical or moral integrity, denying their basic rights, or reducing them to sub-human conditions of poverty or abandonment represents contempt of the divine will. Rather, the promotion of the good of the person and of human dignity is to glorify God and sanctify his Name. The Church does so using only the means, but all of them, «which are in accord with the Gospel and the welfare of all people» (Gaudium et spes, n. 76). For their part by respecting the divine will for the human person, governments fulfil their true mission on behalf of the common good when, as the Council affirms, they protect «the sum total of those conditions of social life which enable people to achieve a fuller measure of perfection with greater ease», which «consists especially in safeguarding the rights and duties of the human person» (Dignitatis humanae, n. 6).

3. I would like to tell you once again, Mr Ambassador, of the firm desire of the Holy See and the Church in Cuba to do whatever they can to promote an atmosphere of dialogue and better understanding with the Authorities and the various institutions of your country. This will certainly be enhanced by the declared intention to eliminate from law and administrative activity anything that presupposes discrimination or a lesser consideration for those citizens who profess to be believers and who loyally want to contribute to the spiritual and moral prosperity of the nation. The acceptance of a more active presence of Catholics in public life besides promoting dialogue, will doubtlessly have a good effect on the civil community. Indeed, in a constitutional State the full de facto recognition of religious freedom is both a result and a safeguard of the other civil liberties, in it we can see one of the most profound manifestations of human freedom and a first-class contribution for the proper functioning of the life of society and the pursuit of the common good.

4. A sign of this desire for understanding is the entry of a certain number of women religious and a few priests into your country. Called to a vocation of selfless service, they devote their life to the Church's evangelizing mission, to easing suffering, to teaching and educating, giving witness of selfless devotion on behalf of the most needy. I express my wish that new priests may be incorporated into the apostolate in order better to attend to the pastoral needs of the Cuban ecclesial communities.

5. In your address, Mr Ambassador, you referred to the grave problem of the external debt and its consequences on the economy and daily life of entire peoples. Indeed, the social and human cost which this crisis of indebtedness exacts requires that the situation must not be considered in merely economic or financial terms. The criteria of justice, equity and solidarity must be defended and supported; in an atmosphere of shared responsibility and mutual trust, they can inspire openness to initiatives which will avoid frustrating the legitimate hopes of so many Cubans for the development that is due them.

You also made mention of the difficult conditions your country is experiencing the result of the sudden changes in the field of international relations. The Church, faithful to her mission on behalf of the great causes of mankind, is always disposed to cooperate in satisfying the moral and material needs of the human person. Therefore, I express my wishes that through a climate of greater dialogue and international cooperation, your country can overcome the present difficulties. In this regard the Holy See has never ceased being interested and offering its support.

Mr. Ambassador, before concluding this meeting, I would like to express again my best wishes for the success of the lofty mission you are now beginning.

I ask you please to express my deferential and cordial greeting to Your President, his Government, the Authorities and the Cuban people. I invoke the gifts of the Most High upon you, your family and co-workers, and especially upon all the beloved sons and daughters of the Cuban nation.

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