



# The Holy See

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**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS  
POPE JOHN PAUL II  
TO H.E. Mr Carlos Abella y Ramallo,  
AMBASSADOR OF SPAIN TO THE HOLY SEE\***

*Friday, 10 January 1997*

*Mr Ambassador,*

1. I am pleased to receive you on this solemn occasion when you present to me your Letters of Credence as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Kingdom of Spain to the Holy See. In offering you a cordial welcome, I am pleased to renew the expression of my recognition and appreciation of the noble Spanish nation, so dear to my heart.

I thank you for your kind words and the cordial greetings from His Majesty King Juan Carlos I and the Prime Minister, who in conveying the Spanish people's sentiments, have again wished to express their esteem and appreciation, to which I respond by imploring the Lord for abundant graces to help them accomplish their mission.

2. Your nation has a long and admirable history of fidelity and service to the Church, which makes it the guardian of a rich spiritual heritage that today's generations have received and are called to preserve and hand on to those of the future. Your entire history deserves admiration and respect and "should serve to inspire and stimulate you to find in the present moment the deepest roots of a people's existence. Not so that you can live in the past, but rather as an example for your continuing and improving that spirit in the future" (*Arrival address*, Barajas Airport, Madrid, 31 October 1982, n. 5).

3. A particular feature of the present moment in Spain is the strengthening of freedoms, reflecting the universal quest for freedom that is a feature of our time (cf. *Address to the United Nations*, 5 October 1995, n. 2; *L'Osservatore Romano* English edition, 11 October 1995, p. 8). As the years

passed, this process has had many positive aspects, although others have yet to be resolved. In this regard, society must be increasingly aware that if freedom loses its respect for the human being and for his fundamental rights and duties, it is no more than an empty or even dangerously ambiguous word. On the other hand, it should be taken into account that what is established and authorized by law in a democratic system of government cannot be merely identified with moral principles, as if they were practically equivalent, since we know that freedom of expression and choice are not enough in themselves — however noble and true they may be — to bring about a truly human freedom. This is why the Church, in fidelity to her mission, teaches that freedom really flourishes when it is deeply rooted in the truth about man.

This same truth about man, created in God's image and likeness, must inspire every action undertaken in building society. The Church feels called to collaborate in this task and therefore Bishops, the leaders of God's People, exercise their magisterium to shed light on the deep relationship of social life with faith and morals, encouraging all to reflect seriously and act conscientiously as a result, in order to continue building an ever more just and human society, founded on ethical values.

4. Several current problems, which have been going on for a number of years, must be dealt with decisively, to prevent them from becoming chronic and undermining the peaceful coexistence and integral progress of the Spanish people. Among them, one cause for concern is the high level of unemployment. This makes it difficult for young people to start a family and look to the future serenely, and for already existing families it becomes critical; disenchantment with the government, sometimes caused by cases of corruption; the tragic reality of an endemic terrorism that hurts both its victims as well as those who perpetrate it. In this regard, I cannot conceal my sorrow at the kidnappings which have continued for many months and have tinged with sadness the recent and cherished Christmas celebrations in their respective homes. It has led to protests of solidarity by many Spaniards. I know that the National Government has taken steps to solve all these problems; to do so, it will find in the Pastors and faithful of the Church in Spain the necessary co-operation, since Catholics know that Christian commitment leads them to promote all that furthers the common good.

5. Among its basic principles, society must include the defence of life, of all human life, and the advancement of families. For this reason, if society is to make true progress, it must not disregard these basic pillars and should protect them in whatever way necessary from the social, legislative and financial standpoint. Regarding a certain ethical decline in the family institution, I would like to recall what I wrote in my *Letter to Families*: "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" (n. 17).

6. On the international scene, an *ethic of solidarity* should also be fostered if participation and an equitable distribution of goods, as well as economic growth, are to characterize the future of humanity. International co-operation, when properly understood, is an appropriate path to follow, as I pointed out in my address at the headquarters of the United Nations (cf. 5 October 1995, n. 13).

Due to its location in Europe and the history that links it to Latin America, Spain is called to make a positive contribution to a future of peace in Europe and on the other continents. For this reason I offer you my best wishes that your country, faithful to its human, spiritual and moral principles, may advance as it did in the past, in the commitment to furthering fraternal relations among all nations, especially among those to which it is linked by history and tradition.

7. The many ties between the Holy See and Spain are strengthened by a long history. At the present time, the role of the Agreements signed between the Church and the Spanish State continue to be an effective way to serve all citizens. For this reason, based on formal respect for the letter of the Agreements and with mutual cordiality and understanding, it is possible to make headway in improving current relations to reach common results and conclusions on important topics of interest to both parties such as, among others, legislation regarding education and instruction. The Catholic Church considers it the family's right to choose the kind of education its children will receive, without legal obstacles or financial restrictions. This right, recognized also in international treaties, requires that the educational system fully respect the convictions of each, be at the service of every Spaniard, and not be subject to the vagaries of political change. Thus I hope that through dialogue, negotiation and respect, progress will be made in mutual co-operation, between the civil authorities and the ecclesiastical hierarchy in this and in other areas.

8. Mr Ambassador, as you prepare to begin your important mission to this Apostolic See, I am pleased to express my best wishes for the fulfilment of your task. I ask you to convey to His Majesty the King, as well as to the Government and the Spanish people, my best wishes for peace, for spiritual and material prosperity and for mutual solidarity among all Spaniards, on whom I affectionately invoke the blessings of the Lord through the intercession of their patroness, the Immaculate Conception, who is so venerated in this land.

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\**L'Osservatore Romano. Weekly edition in English* n. 6 p.8.

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