



The Holy See

Your Excellency,

1. My first sentiment on arriving in the Netherlands Antilles is one of joyful gratitude to Almighty God who has made this visit possible. In your person I greet the authorities and the entire population of these beautiful islands.

I have kissed the soil of Curaçao as a sign of my cordial esteem and friendship towards all the peoples of this region. As Bishop of Rome and the Successor of Peter, I have done so in homage to all those who have testified here, in words of truth and deeds of love, to the power of the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. I am filled with joy at the thought of meeting the Catholic faithful, especially at the Eucharistic celebration where they will gather with their priests, with Bishop Ellis and with many other Bishops of the Caribbean area.

2. As a fellow-pilgrim with the rest of the human family, living in a world which is witnessing dramatic social and political changes, my visit is meant to be an expression, before you and before all men and women of good will, of the Church's profound solidarity with developing peoples. Individuals and peoples everywhere aspire to be truly free. They seek support in overcoming the obstacles that stand in the way of their full development. They are willing to undertake and endure much in order to achieve a more human way of life.

The real challenge facing developing nations is as much spiritual as material. It is the challenge of enabling the sense of human dignity to develop and flourish. It is the task of building into the very fabric of society a profound sense of human rights and of the corresponding personal and social responsibilities of every citizen. In a word, it is the ever-present duty of considering and treating each human being according to his or her unique worth as a beloved child of the Creator.

3. I wish to encourage you in this great enterprise. And I pray to Almighty God that the people of the Netherlands Antilles, with wise counsel and generous endeavour, will build a just and caring society, a place of peace and well-being for all the inhabitants of these islands.

Your Excellency, thank you again for your warm welcome.

Madam Prime Minister, Distinguished Members of Government, Ladies and Gentlemen,

4. At the beginning of my Pastoral Visit to Curaçao, I wish to greet each of you and to thank you for your warm welcome to these islands. The Netherlands Antilles have been blessed with a natural beauty which has long attracted visitors from throughout the world. But God has also blessed you with a rich variety of races and peoples who are striving together to build a unified and harmonious society. It is my fervent prayer that the peace which comes from God will continue to find a home in your hearts, in your families, and in every area of your social and civic life.

Madam Prime Minister, I express my deep gratitude for this opportunity to come to Curaçao and to visit the people of the Netherlands Antilles. My presence among you comes at a significant time, as people, of the Americas and from elsewhere are preparing to commemorate the five hundredth anniversary of the first voyage of Christopher Columbus to the Caribbean. It is my hope that this Visit of the Pope to Curaçao will help to recall the inspiration which the Christian faith provided to those who, in the midst of difficulties of all kinds, sought to uphold human dignity and lay foundations for a just and peaceful society.

Although my Pastoral Visit is primarily directed to the Catholics of the Diocese of Willemstad, I hope that all men and women of good will, whatever their religious beliefs, will find in my brief stay among you an opportunity to consider the significance of those religious and moral values which are necessary for the integral well-being both of individuals and of entire societies. Those values have inspired generations of your countrymen in their efforts to forge bonds of unity and harmony among disparate peoples and traditions. In the next hours, as I celebrate the Eucharist and pray with many of your fellow citizens, we shall beseech God that fidelity to those same values will always guide your progress as a people.

5. In the present world situation, marked by rapid social and political changes, it has become increasingly evident that the concerns which shape societies in their development cannot be limited to the narrow plane of local or national self-interest, but must take on a broader character. Indeed, what is required of all peoples in these last years of the twentieth century is a solidarity that embraces the entire human family and each of its members. The solidarity is " a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good... to the good of all and of each individual, because we are all really responsible for all ".

The fostering of this determination on every level of society is one of the great moral challenges of our time and the key to an effective collaboration of individuals, social groups and nations in providing for the needs and aspirations of the entire human race. Only through a resolute commitment to dialogue, cooperation and respect for objective principles of morality will your society be able to face the increasingly complex social, economic and political issues of the present day.

In this way, the Netherlands Antilles can make its rightful contribution to many other societies throughout the world as they are confronted by similar challenges and strive to respond to them in a way worthy of their best traditions.

In this regard, I would note the important role played in the development of any society by its educators and its educational institutions. The Catholics of the Netherlands Antilles have long been committed to the work of educating the young in knowledge and virtue. The Church rightly considers this apostolate as a significant contribution to the life of your people, and is committed to cooperate constructively with the State on behalf of the education of all citizens.

6. Ladies and Gentlemen: almost five hundred years ago, the first meeting of Europeans with the peoples of the Americas signalled the beginning of a new chapter in mankind's history. At the present moment, when men and women throughout the world ardently hope for the beginning of a new era of peace and cooperation among nations, I encourage you in your efforts to build a society marked by justice and respect for the dignity of all.

May Almighty God pour out his abundant blessings on you and all the people of Curaçao, of the Netherlands Antilles and the entire Caribbean.

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