



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER TO THE NEW AMBASSADOR OF CHILE TO THE HOLY SEE*

Monday, 18 June 2001

Mr Ambassador,

1. I receive you with great pleasure at this solemn act of the presentation of the Letters accrediting you as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Chile to this Apostolic See, and I am delighted to offer you a most cordial welcome at the time when you are beginning the important office entrusted to you by your Government. I am grateful for your kind words, and especially for the greeting of President Ricardo Lagos Escobar, which I reciprocate with my best wishes that his service to the Chilean people, at this moment in its history, will help everyone to progress on the path of concrete, mutual understanding and peace.

2. You come as a representative of a people with deep Christian roots, as you recalled in your address. They have enriched the country with noble traditions that have shaped the national identity and made Chileans a profoundly religious people. I had the opportunity to meet them in my unforgettable pastoral visit in 1987, during which I received many expressive demonstrations of affection from them all, from Antofagasta to Punta Arenas. Thus I could see that Chileans are resistant people, in search of paths that will lead them to the longed for reconciliation although on the way to this goal they will have to pass through some narrow straits. This is why I would like to repeat once again as I did at the beatification of the young Carmelite, Teresa de los Andes, that "*love is stronger*", since "*love can always do more*".

Faith and piety, so deeply rooted in the Chilean soul, have been most fruitful, even producing saints like St Teresa de los Andes and the Blessed Servants of God like Bl. Laura Vicuña and Bl. Alberto Hurtado. Further, it is only right to recall how the Founding Fathers were convinced believers. In this regard, attention should be drawn to General Bernardo O'Higgins' initiative in

asking the Apostolic See for a papal mission in Chile that could resolve the religious problems which had arisen with independence and with the new organization of the Church in Chile, by providing various Episcopates: thus Chile became the first Latin American nation to welcome a papal mission after its national emancipation. From that time, the country has recognized the Catholic Church's importance as the true mother and guarantor of its independence, creating through the Church ties of respect and filial attachment to the Roman Pontiff, and constantly maintaining cordial relations with the Holy See in this spirit.

3. The Church has made a vast and enriching contribution to Chilean life, both in colonial times as well as after national independence, for her presence in the significant periods of your homeland's history can easily be perceived. In your address, you cited several eminent servants of the Church who, with their words and pastoral action, accompanied Chile's development towards ever higher goals. Together with them should be recalled the numerous pastors and faithful who found in the Gospel ideals the source of inspiration to work for the common good in different professional contexts, each one wherever Providence sent him.

In fulfilling her mission to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ, the Church helps to promote the integral good of individuals and is most particularly involved in fostering supportive coexistence and reconciliation among all the citizens, children of the same land; likewise, she wants to enlighten consciences so that certain dangers in contemporary society such as ethical relativism, consumerism and other pseudo-cultures, do not corrode the treasure of Christian values on which the national identity is based. Concerning this, the recent Pastoral Guidelines of the Bishops of Chile entitled: "If you but knew the gift of God!", are intended to be an announcement of hope at the beginning of the third millennium, inviting people to recover from the wounds that sap the strength of Chile's social growth, among which should be pointed out poverty and the enormous inequalities, the problems that families must contend with and the impaired dignity of individuals, families, groups and institutions.

4. You also mentioned your desire to defend and reinforce families, which is so necessary since "at a time in history like the present, special attention must also be given to the pastoral care of the family, particularly when this fundamental institution is experiencing a radical and widespread crisis" (*Novo Millennio ineunte*, n. 47). I am pleased with these resolutions and hope that government leaders and all society will be consistent with history and with the country's most genuine tradition, and will spare no efforts in this regard, so that it will not give into the easy temptations that are sometimes masked by the appearance of false modernity. It is therefore of the greatest importance to safeguard and strengthen this institution. There is no doubt that many social evils derive from the disintegration of the family which is why the new generations must be taught the meaning of true love and the total and indissoluble gift of self in marriage, which makes it possible to overcome moments of misunderstanding and distrust, so that each Chilean home may be a place of love and peace, and a true school of humanity.

5. The aspiration to an ever more prosperous and developed Chile demands an effort to improve the quality of life and standard of living of Chileans. I am pleased with the recent deliberation of the Supreme Government and the legislative authority which - with the Church's loyal collaboration - has abolished the death penalty and it is to be hoped that this will be a motive that encourages the most zealous and indispensable respect for the life of every human being, from his conception to his natural death. In this way, bearing witness to love of neighbour, to love of the family in its most fundamental sense and to love of life, it will be possible to give the new generations a grounding in basic ethics that will result in the moral greatness of your people.

6. Mr Ambassador, your country has given eloquent proof of affection for its democratic tradition and of a strong national integration, which is reflected in the stability of its institutions. Since the bicentenary of national independence is at hand and the ideal is to increase as far as possible the civil, social and cultural freedoms, as you yourself pointed out, it must be borne in mind that the strengthening of democracy must always be accompanied by the constant promotion of the genuine values that are the guarantee of stability, because a democracy devoid of values does not serve progress but, on the contrary, turns against man himself.

On the international scene, Chile has achieved a significant position in Latin America, both by her contribution at the international forums and by her membership in organizations that promote development and progress. In this regard, I would like to draw attention to the Chileans' desire for peace, which was highlighted during Chile's quarrel with her sister republic, Argentina, where I was an eye witness of the understanding between two nations that wanted to overcome the disagreement and to dedicate to development what had been destroyed by weapons and succeeded. More recently, Chile has resolved outstanding matters with Peru, by signing, in November 1999, the Act for implementing the clauses of the Treaty of Lima of 1929, once again focusing her forces on the development and well-being of her society and avoiding conflicts with other nations.

To conclude, Mr Ambassador, I offer you my very best wishes for the success of your mission. At the Holy See you will always find the willingness to serve the good of the beloved Chilean people and to foster the good relations that exist between your country and this Apostolic See. I ask the Lord, through the intercession of Our Lady of Carmel, to help you carry out your role, to bless your distinguished and numerous family and your staff as well as the government leaders and citizens of the noble Chilean nation, which I always remember with esteem and bless with affection.

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