



The Holy See

***DISCURSO DEL SANTO PADRE JUAN PABLO II
AL SEÑOR MANUEL ANTONIO HERNÁNDEZ GUTIÉRREZ,
EMBAJADOR DE COSTA RICA ANTE LA SANTA SEDE****

Martes 19 de noviembre de 1991

Mr. Ambassador,

I am very glad to receive the Letters of Credence accrediting you as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Costa Rica to the Holy See. In welcoming you cordially at this presentation, I am pleased to assure you in person of the deep affection I feel for all your noble country's sons and daughters.

I am sincerely grateful for the respectful greeting that the President of the Republic, Don Rafael Angel Calderon Fournier, has wished you to convey to me, and I beg you to give him my warmest greetings and the assurance that I will pray to the Almighty for the prosperity and spiritual good of all Costa Ricans.

Mr. Ambassador, I was particularly pleased with your message that reminded me of the warm celebrations of faith and hope which I was fortunate enough to experience during my pastoral visit, in which I was able to appreciate the most genuine values of the noble Christian soul of Costa Ricans.

2. Today Costa Rica is living a particular moment: while it feels justly proud of what it has achieved in the field of human development, it looks to the future with confidence and is striving to reach new goals in progress. Furthermore, the broad path of peace, democracy and concern for social justice which have played a positive role in the country Your Excellency represents are well known, as are Costa Rica's praiseworthy initiatives in this past decade for peace in the region of Central America, as it works to complete the Esquipulas agreements. All this has been endorsed by the cultural identity of a people deeply inspired by the Gospel and the Catholic faith.

The current priority interest – which corresponds to a common effort by all the Central American Republics and also constitutes the lodestar of the forthcoming Presidential Summits – is to accelerate the stage of economic stability and to find adequate ways to work out a programme which pays preferential attention to the less privileged classes.

Without a doubt, all this is an important aspect of the whole situation, but it is always necessary to take into account – as I stressed in my recent Encyclical *Centesimus annus* – that it is an illusion to think of building the common good while neglecting a moral foundation (cf. n. 60). In the great concern to hasten positive economic development it is essential to respect the intimate spiritual and moral structure of human beings, their dignity and their openness to a transcendent destiny.

This is the motive that throughout history has inspired the Church to strive to illuminate the very realities of the earthly city by proclaiming the Good News. Her evangelical work is not limited to teaching the revealed truths but she seeks to transform the criteria the lines of thought, the meaning of the existence of humans in the world, to direct them according to the Word of God and his plan of salvation. As I pointed out at the beginning of my Pontificate: «This difficult road of the indispensable transformation of the structures of economic life is one on which it will not be easy to go forward without the intervention of a true conversion of mind, will and heart. The task requires resolute commitment by individuals and peoples that are free and linked in solidarity» (*Redemptor hominis*, n. 16). In Costa Rica, too, the Church, guided by her zealous pastors, desires to intensify her evangelization work, especially now, approaching the fifth centenary of the arrival of the Christian message in the New World.

Mr Ambassador, the Government that you have the honour to represent has repeated its intention to commit itself to the improvement of the social and economic order on the basis of the moral values that have inspired the Costa Rican people in its journey through history. It is thus the task of the public authority to promote, by effective means a culture of authentic solidarity that, setting a limit to the selfishness of individuals and groups, may enable the cause of justice and the sincere and effective desire to serve the common good to prevail.

Faithful to the requirements of the Gospel and conscious that «her social message will gain credibility more immediately from the “witness of actions” than as a result of its internal logic and consistency», the Church in Costa Rica will not shirk her efforts to promote and protect human beings, the citizens and children of God. Pastors, priests and religious communities, motivated by their desire for an evangelical witness, will continue to make a valuable contribution in such vital fields as education, health care, and service to the poorest and neediest.

One particularly important field, as much for the Church as for civil institutions, is the family and youth. For them, in exercising their evangelizing mission the pastors have not ceased to show their concern over certain anti-birth campaigns and certain school programmes on sex education.

In fact, it is the mission of the Church to form consciences and to offer criteria in such delicate matters that have a great influence on behaviour and on the moral principles of people, especially on children and youth.

We can do no less than observe that if the moral and religious dimension of the problems associated with the transmission of life are neglected, their value as a joyful gift of God is weakened, and doors are opened to attitudes of permissiveness that undermine the lofty, noble ideals that should be offered to youth. The defence of life, as well as a sound education to chastity as a virtue that develops the authentic maturity of the person, are themes of great importance not only from the point of view of moral and spiritual values, but also as elements of the common good, which should therefore be respected by the institutions responsible and appropriately integrated in the legislation of the State.

Mr. Ambassador, before concluding this meeting, I wish to express the assurance of my esteem and support, together with my warmest wishes that your important mission may be fruitful for the good of Costa Rica. I beg you again to convey my thoughts and wishes to your Government and the other institutions of your country, as I invoke the blessing of God on you, your family and colleagues, and especially on the beloved sons and daughters of the noble nation of Costa Rica.

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