



The Holy See

PELLEGRINAGGIO APOSTOLICO IN COLOMBIA

VISITA UFFICIALE DI GIOVANNI PAOLO II AL PRESIDENTE DELLA REPUBBLICA NELLA «CASA DE NARIÑO»*

Bogotá (Colombia) - Martedì, 1° luglio 1986

1. I greet you, outstanding representatives of the leading sectors of Colombia, and I thank you for your presence here to attend one of my first meetings on this apostolic journey, so longed for, to your beloved country. I feel especially grateful to the President of the Republic, for having offered the presidential residence for this meeting, and for having introduced with such heart felt words this distinguished group of people who have singularly important responsibilities in the nation's life. I want to express my appreciation and gratitude for the plan of study and reflection which you have been carrying out upon my encyclical *Laborem Exercens*, in order to delve deeper into the social teaching of the Church. The very fact that this meeting takes place here, in the Casa de Narino, residence of the Presidents of Colombia, is a further proof of the significant reality which we could call the special Christian vocation of Colombia almost five centuries after the arrival of the Good News to this land blessed by God. The noble Colombian people, whom you desire to serve by contributing to their true progress in all fields, have made their own the Gospel message which throughout your glorious history has influenced your life and customs. From this fact there derive for the leaders of this country some specific responsibilities related to what I have called the special Christian vocation of Colombia, which have to guide your life and activities as citizens invested with authority and as believers. My words this evening intend to share with you some reflections to help you to assume your responsibilities as accomplished Colombians and as lay people in the Church, so that this society be more and more inspired by the lasting values of Christ's Gospel and make you progress on the path of peace, justice and equality of all Colombians, without regard to origin or social condition.

2. In your career as leaders you have tried to seek the ways, overcome the obstacles and create the conditions to permit a new society to arise in Colombia. On this occasion there come to my mind the words of my venerated predecessor, Pope Paul VI, spoken during his unforgettable visit to this very capital: «Realize and undertake with courage, men of leadership, the necessary innovations for the world which surrounds you... And do not forget that certain crisis of history could have taken other directions, if the necessary reforms had timely forestalled, with courageous sacrifice, the explosive revolutions of despair» (Homily of the Mass for the Day of Development, 23 August 1968). Doubtless you have reflected occasionally upon this prophetic calling. You know, beloved leaders, the reality of our world and more specifically that of the Latin American countries, and you are aware that their path to progress raises not a few great questions. In the encyclical *Populorum Progressio* Pope Paul VI indicated a sickness in the world, which he identifies with the lack of brotherhood between men and peoples (cf. n. 66). In

this respect, in my encyclical *Dives in Misericordia* I wanted to emphasize the fact that a moral concern weighs on the world, an increasing one, with respect to man and the destiny of humanity (cf. n. 11), above all with regard to the profound inequalities between nations and within them. How can we fail to see such a concern in the peoples of Latin America, and particularly among the young, who constitute the majority in the countries of this continent? This moral problem is nourished by the phenomenon of violence, unemployment, alienation and other factors which cause imbalance, threatening peaceful co existence. Viewing without emotion the panorama of your country, do not you also have a clear impression of the presence of this moral concern in your society? The Church, which confides in you and which asks you to be builders of a more just society, invites you to reflect with me on this subject of such great transcendence.

3. This is a society in which hard work, honesty, the spirit of participation in all orders and levels, the activation of justice and charity, are a reality. A society which carries the seal of Christian values as the strongest factor of social cohesion and the best guarantee of its future. A harmonious living together which eliminates the barriers to national unity and constitutes the framework of developing the country and of human progress. A society in which the fundamental rights of the person are safeguarded and preserved, as well as the civil liberties and the social rights, with full freedom and responsibility, and in which all imitate each other in the noble sense of the country, thus carrying out their human and Christian vocation. An imitation which should be projected in the service of the poorest and most needy, in the countryside and in the cities. A society which travels in an atmosphere of peace, of harmony; in which violence and terrorism do not extend their tragic and macabre domination; and injustices and inequalities do not lead to despair important sectors of the population and drive them to behaviour which rips the social fabric. A country in which youth and children can be formed in a clean environment in which the noble soul of Colombia, enlightened by the Gospel, can shine in all its splendour. For all this, which we can call a civilization of love (cf. *Puebla*, n. 8), your views and resolutions need to converge more and more.

4. To accomplish this new civilization, you will meet grave obstacles, not easy to overcome but which should not discourage you in your tasks. Some proceed from abroad, and others originate within your own society. Among the first I would have to mention the serious economic crisis through which the world is passing these last years and which has particularly affected the less fortunate countries. The difficulties of the more developed countries have led them to resolve their own problems through measures which have made even more critical the situation of the not so prosperous, increasing and aggravating their problems. On repeated occasions the Church has interceded for the search for and consolidation of unity among peoples, of an international community in which the nations will be respected in their identity and diversity and helped in solidarity to attain the common good. The social question has acquired worldwide dimensions, in which the relations of justice and solidarity between rich peoples and poor peoples constitute a priority. The urgency of an integral development, of «the whole of man and all men» (*Populorum Progressio*, 14) continues to be pressing. Poor people cannot pay intolerable social costs, sacrificing the right to development, which passes them by while other peoples enjoy opulence. Dialogue among peoples is indispensable to arrive at fair agreements in which not everything is reduced to an economy rigidly deduced from economic laws, without a soul and without moral criteria. Here is noticed the need of international solidarity which has truly special importance in the problem of foreign debt, which affects Latin America and other countries of the world.

5. Another series of obstacles proceed from society itself. Some do not depend wholly on your will, and to overcome them will require time and effort, such as the insufficiency of economic infrastructures, the lack of means of finance and advanced technology, the weakness of the domestic market. But there are also obstacles which are attributable to the responsibility of the citizens and which can and ought to be corrected as soon as possible. I know that they are an object of your concern and that they also constitute challenges to creativity and the search for solutions. Among these factors which impede development are found violence, insecurity, contraband, unjust distribution of wealth, illegal economic activity and also, as is known,

the massive transfer of capital abroad, which is needed within the country. One of the consequences of this list of difficulties is the phenomenon of unemployment, which touches the heart of the social problem through the right to work and the eminent dignity of work, as I have expressed at greater length in my encyclical *Laborem Exercens* (cf. n. 18). You are aware of the difficulties of a healthy policy of employment in the present economic circumstances, but you also know that the creation of new positions of work and a fair salary level is something basic to guarantee the future and avoid great evils in families without protection and in the nation at large.⁶ Allow me to address to you, dear businessmen, a trusting and urgent word. Since you are Christian businessmen, you cannot conceive of business except as a community of persons; consequently, the centre of reference of your economic activity should always be the interest in every human being. As I said three years ago to Italian businessmen in Milan: «Even in the moments of great crisis, if one wants really to bring about a community of persons at work, it is necessary to take into account the particular person and the dramas that are not only individual, but also of the family, to which recourse to dismissal would inevitably lead» (Address to businessmen, 22 May 1983). I invite you to increase your efforts, with a sense of creativity, justice and detachment so that jobs multiply. With these and other similar efforts, it is necessary to narrow as much as possible the gap between rich and poor, which at times widens in an alarming way (cf. *Puebla*, n. 1, 209).⁷ In evident contrast with the civilization of love, there appears with disturbing characteristics the spectre of violence, which leaves its trail of sorrow and death in so many areas of the world. We witness, not without suffering, the attacks on peace that come from the quite varied forms of violence whose extreme and horrible expression is terrorism, which has its root in political and economic factors aggravated by the interference of ideologies, foreign powers and, not infrequently, by the dearth of fundamental moral values. For the Pope it is a primary duty to plead for peace before a humanity seriously threatened by the scourge of violence. Colombia has made generous efforts to attain peace in its territory and in neighbouring countries. Continue to put all your desire into obtaining peace and consolidating it. For my part I have fervent desires that Colombians attain this precious gift which I shall have an opportunity to discuss on other occasions during my pastoral visit.⁸ The task you are entrusted with is immense and will be achieved only by a constant effort continued in time. But if the solution of material problems cannot be immediate, it is possible to make a more just society starting now. It is possible to make a more just distribution of the efforts and sacrifices necessary. It is possible to establish an order of priorities which take account of the fact that man is the subject and not the object of economics and politics. The greatest wealth and the best capital of country are its people, and Colombia is a country rich in humanity and Christianity. You have a large number of professionals with much professional competence, and there are many more who are in the process of preparation. You have a proven democratic tradition, with not a few years of experience. You have a potentially rich country, with various resources and possibilities of different types. Put all that at the service of a country which needs you, leaving aside egoism and overcoming political antagonisms which impede the attainment in solidarity of the common good. You also have the greatest treasure, the greatest wealth which a people can have: solid Christian values rooted in your people and in yourselves, values you need to revive, preserve and defend. Profound values of respect for life, for man; values of generosity and solidarity, values of ability to dialogue and actively seek the common good. They are like springs which you know how to use in moments of special danger or when calamities of earthly disasters have struck. How one experiences, in such moments the strength of fraternity! How other interests are left aside to attend to one's brother's need!⁹ If in moments of special gravity you know how to actualize those human and spiritual resources, it means that the only thing you need is strong reasons to do the same with the less spectacular but no less urgent task of reconstructing and making your nation more prosperous and more just. And what greater reason can I remind you of in this respect than the teaching contained in the Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* of Vatican Council II? Dealing with the dignity of the human person, the Council offers us Christ as restorer and prototype of our very dignity.

«He who is the image of the invisible God (Col :15) is himself the perfect man who has restored in the children of Adam that likeness to God which had been disfigured ever since the first sin. Human nature, by the very fact that it was assumed, not absorbed, in him, has been raised in us to a dignity beyond compare... Conformed to the image of the Son who is the firstborn of many brothers, the Christian man receives the first fruit of the Spirit (Rom 8:23)» (GS 22). Each time that you meet a fellow citizen of yours, poor or in need, if you truly look at him with the eyes of faith you will see in him the image of God, you will see Christ, you will see a temple of the Holy Spirit; and you will realize that what you have done for him you have done for Christ himself. The evangelist St Matthew puts these words in our Lord's mouth: «Truly I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of my brethren, you did it to me».(Mt 25:40).

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