



# The Holy See

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PASTORAL VISIT TO AMERICA

***ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II  
TO THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS  
ACCREDITED TO MEXICO\****

Adolfo López Mateos Hall of the Presidential Residence  
Saturday, 23 January 1999

*Mr President of the Republic,*

*Your Excellencies, the Ambassadors and Heads of Mission,*

*Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,*

1. I am very grateful to President Ernesto Zedillo Ponce de León for his kind words introducing me to the Heads of diplomatic missions accredited to Mexico. Their presentation to the Pope in your official residence of Los Pinos is a respectful gesture which I warmly appreciate.

Within the context of this Pastoral Visit, I am very pleased to meet you who are responsible for the relations of your respective States with Mexico, reinforcing them with dialogue and cooperation, and testifying at the same time to this nation's importance in the world. You also represent the international community with which the Holy See maintains ancient and stable relations, confirming an age-old tradition that grows more vigorous each day.

2. We live in a world of both complexity and unity; the various communities of which it is composed are drawing closer together, and the financial and economic systems on which the integral development of humanity depends are more extensive and rapid. This growing interdependency leads to new stages of progress, but at the same time includes the risk of seriously limiting the personal and community freedom that belongs to all democratic life. Therefore, a social system must be promoted which allows all peoples to take an active part in furthering their integral progress; otherwise, many of these peoples could find themselves prevented from achieving it.

Contemporary progress, unparalleled in the past, must enable all human beings to see their dignity safeguarded and to be offered a deeper awareness of the greatness of their own destiny. However, at the same time it exposes human

beings - both the strongest and those socially and politically weakest - to the danger of becoming just a number or a mere economic factor (cf. *Centesimus annus*, n. 49). If this were the case, the human being could gradually lose the awareness of his transcendent value. This awareness - at times obvious, at others implicit - is what distinguishes man from all other beings in nature.

3. Faithful to the mission received from her Founder, the Church tirelessly proclaims that the human person must be the centre of every civil and social order, of every system of technological and economic development. Human history cannot go against man. This would be tantamount to opposing God, whose living image is the human being, even when he is disfigured by error or transgression.

This is the conviction that the Church would like to put on the table of the United Nations, or to express in the amicable dialogue she maintains with you, the members of the Diplomatic Corps, and with the authorities you represent in various parts of the world. From these principles can be deduced the important moral and civic values that were stressed by the Bishops of America meeting at the 1997 Synod in Rome.

4. Among these values, conversion of minds and effective solidarity between the various human groups stand out as essential elements for contemporary social life at the national and international level. International life requires a basis of common moral values and common rules of collaboration. Certainly, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, whose 50th anniversary we celebrated last year, and other documents of universal value offer important elements in the search for this moral foundation, common to all countries, or at least to a great many of them.

If we look at the world scene, we see that certain situations exist which are easy to note. The power of the developed countries is becoming increasingly burdensome to the developing countries. In international relations, priority is sometimes given to the economy over human values, and as they are weakened, freedom and democracy are affected. On the other hand, the arms race shows us that in many cases weapons are meant for defence, but in others, they are truly offensive and used in the name of ideologies that do not always respect human dignity. The phenomenon of corruption is regrettably making inroads into large areas of the social fabric of some nations, without those who suffer the consequences always having an opportunity to demand justice and accountability. Individualism is also marring international life, with the result that the powerful nations are able to grow more so each day, while the weaker ones become increasingly dependent.

5. In view of this situation, an appropriate conversion of minds and an effective, not merely theoretical, solidarity are required among persons and human groups. This is what the Latin American Episcopate, in union with the Pope, has been suggesting for decades. This is what the Bishops of the American continent asked for at the Synod. In this regard we should mention the many relief efforts for the peoples in neighbouring Central America affected by Hurricane Mitch, in which Mexico generously participated together with other nations, showing a shared sense of fraternity and solidarity.

America is a continent that includes large, technologically advanced nations and others which are relatively small, with varying levels of development. Even in the same country, very different social and human situations exist side by side, as in Mexico, situations which must always be treated with great respect and justice, with tireless recourse to dialogue and cooperation.

America forms a human and geographical unit that extends from the North Pole to the South. Although its past is rooted in ancestral cultures - such as the Mayan, Olmec, Aztec or Incan - from contact with the old continent and with Christianity for over five centuries, it has come to share a common destiny which is unique in the world. America in itself is a particularly suitable place for promoting shared values that can guarantee an effective conversion of minds, especially of those who have national and international responsibilities.

6. This continent could be the "Continent of Hope" if the human communities and their ruling classes which comprise it were to adopt a common ethical foundation. The Catholic Church and the other great religious confessions in America can contribute specific elements to this common ethic, elements which free consciences from being limited by ideas deriving from mere incidental consensus. America and all humanity need essential reference-points for all citizens and their political leaders. "Thou shalt not kill", "Thou shalt not lie", "Thou shalt not steal or covet thy neighbour's goods", "Respect the basic dignity of the human person" in his physical and moral dimensions: these are inviolable principles sanctioned in the Decalogue common to Jews, Christians and Muslims, and similar to the norms of other great religions. They are principles which bind every human being as well as the various societies.

These principles and others like them must form a bulwark against any attack on life, from its beginning to its natural end; against wars of expansion and the use of weapons as instruments of destruction; against corruption which erodes broad levels of society, sometimes with transnational dimensions; against the abusive invasion of the private sphere by authorities who approve obligatory sterilization or by laws restricting the right to life; against deceptive advertising campaigns that compromise the truth and determine the lifestyle of entire peoples; against monopolies that seek to block sound initiatives and to limit the growth of whole societies; against the spread of drug abuse which saps the strength of young people and even kills them.

7. Much has been done in this regard. International conventions aimed at limiting some of these abuses are numerous. Groups of nations join forces to create economic spaces where political, economic and social life may be properly oriented and better protected by principles that are more just and in greater conformity with the rights of each citizen, each people and each culture.

However, there is still much to be done. We are approaching the end of a century and a millennium which, despite the great achievements of science and technology, have left an obvious trail of scars that recall, sometimes tragically, the scant attention paid to the moral principles mentioned above. Rather than seeing them further violated, their ethical, morally binding force must be strengthened in the new century and the new millennium.

8. In sharing these thoughts with you, I am motivated by no other concern than to defend human dignity, and by no other authority than the divine Word. This Word is not mine, but comes from God, who became man so that human beings might become his children. With no special interests, I offer you these reflections today in the hope that they can help you in your diplomatic work and your personal life, in your desire to contribute to building a world more human and just than the one we have been offered by the century and millennium now drawing to close.

In the near future, may respect for the life, truth and dignity of every human being prevail! This is the urgent task that awaits us. May God bless the work you are accomplishing. May he bless Mexico and the countries you represent in this

privileged city where America and the world meet and dialogue. Thank you very much for your attention!

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