



The Holy See

***DISCURSO DEL SANTO PADRE JUAN PABLO II
AL SEÑOR JORGE A. FERNÁNDEZ,
NUEVO EMBAJADOR DE PANAMÁ ANTE LA SANTA SEDE****

Sábado 21 de diciembre de 1991

Mr. Ambassador,

I sincerely thank you for the kind words you have addressed to me on this solemn occasion of the presentation of the Letters of Credence that accredit you as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Panama to the Holy See.

First and foremost, I would like to respond to the feelings of friendliness and support that your President and the members of your country's Government have asked you to convey to me, and I beg you to give them my respectful greetings and my best wishes for peace and well-being.

These are happy circumstances that remind me of the intense day of faith and hope lived with the beloved children of Panama during my pastoral visit, and enable me to appreciate the most genuine values of the Panamanian soul.

In your address, Mr. Ambassador, you referred to the widespread and deeply rooted presence of the Catholic faith in the life of your people. Faithful to her commitment to bring the message of salvation to all peoples, the Church is dedicated to promoting everything that encourages the enhancement and the defence of human dignity. Indeed, the value of the person, above all respect for his or her dignity as a child of God, should influence relationships between individuals and groups so that the legitimate rights of each may be safeguarded and society may enjoy stability and harmony. This is what the Bishops of your country wished to emphasize in their recent collective document, «Pastoral choices of the Church in Panama».

The problems to which you referred in your speech are certainly a challenge for the nation's future and demand a greater social responsibility for the common good, on all levels. But the obstacles mentioned should not be an excuse for despondency or dismay since Panama can count on the greatest treasure that a people can possess: the solid Christian values that must give new impulse to the building of a society which is fairer, more fraternal and prosperous. The issues that are a cause for preoccupation at the moment should be faced with clear sightedness, with the responsible participation of all, and with reliance on God whose help should never fail them.

From its origins, the links that have bound Panama to the Church are many and strong, and they have shaped the life and being of her people. Moved by its desire for evangelical testimony and alien to transitory or partial interests, the Church will continue to offer her valid help in fields as important as teaching, assistance to the most underprivileged, health-care services and the integral promotion of the human person as a citizen and a child of God. In this respect, you described the proselytizing activities of the sects that are sowing confusion among the simple people. Indeed, unfortunately there is no lack of strategies and interests foreign to the Panamanian soul which seek to fragment the factors of cohesion, encouraging friction and fostering division. This is why the Bishops of Panama have not ceased to point out the danger represented by these activities as factors of disintegration, which at the same time dilute the coherence and unity of the Gospel message.

I am glad to know that it is a firm proposal of the authorities of your country to build solid foundations to allow the establishment of a social order that will be fairer and more participatory. I hope that in this effort for democratic life, the activity of the Church will make itself felt more each time, with a renewed vocation for service on all levels, especially for those who are most in need, thus contributing to exalt the Panamanian people and to safeguard and promote the highest values.

Mr. Ambassador before concluding this meeting, I should like to give you my very best wishes that the mission that begins today may be fruitful and crowned with success. I beg you again to convey my feelings and good wishes to the authorities of your country, while I invoke God's blessings and the gifts of the Spirit upon you, your family and colleagues, and above all on the beloved children of the noble Panamanian nation.

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