



The Holy See

DISCORSO DI GIOVANNI PAOLO II
AL NUOVO AMBASCIATORE DEL MADAGASCAR PRESSO
LA SANTA SEDE S.E. IL SIGNOR JEAN ERNEST BEZAZA*
Lunedì, 5 gennaio 1987

Plenipotentiary of the Democratic Republic of Madagascar, and to see that the Great Island is once again represented in a stable manner at the Holy See in the framework of the diplomatic relations established almost twenty years ago.

I appreciate the sentiments and the good wishes which you express to me on behalf of His Excellency President Didier Ratsiraka, and your own sentiments too; and I am happy to read in them the expression of the will to seek, together with the Holy See, all that can promote both the good of the nation and the good of the Church in Madagascar, with respect for all the citizens. I ask you to express to the President my gratitude and my cordial good wishes for the high office which he bears and for the happiness of all your fellow countrymen.

2. I appreciated likewise the fine testimony which you have borne in the matter of the religious history of your country. Indeed, the ancestral religion permitted innumerable generations, who could not know the revelation brought by Christ, to adore the Creator of all nature and to consider him as the judge of the conduct of men. In this sense, a certain number of moral and spiritual values were born, which must be brought to their perfection. Christianity started from this favourable point, revealing the fatherhood and the love of God, who unceasingly invites us to brotherly love after the example of Jesus Christ, and with his Spirit. You rightly emphasize the problem of the inculturation of the Christian faith, which has begun well in Madagascar, so that the faith may bear its fruit in harmony with the values which profoundly characterize the Malagasy soul, and in harmony with the essential patrimony of the universal Church. Tolerance – or rather, the respect for other believers – and the progress of ecumenism go together with the Church's concern for evangelization, revealing the Good News of Christ to all in a climate of religious freedom. Yet can one not also say that the Malagasy Christians, who form a large part of the population and who bear great responsibilities at various levels, must at the same time be proud of

the faith of their baptism, and aware of the need to honour this faith, and to draw all the consequences of the faith in their religious witness and in their family, professional and civic life, finding in the Gospel an ever new dynamism of truth, of justice, and of brotherhood – precisely those things which society needs? One must wish that the Christians may never separate the faith which is their glory from the behaviour of the faith that is lived out.

3. In Madagascar, as in many lands, the participation of the Catholic Church in the service of man is realized in the works which have an influence that Your Excellency has underlined: teaching, education, professional formation, medical care, social institutions, or initiatives of aid and help. We have shared your suffering recently because of the misery that followed the typhoons and the floods. Yes, the Church is happy to carry out these services, as far as she can and as far as she is given support – she seeks to do this for the good of all without distinction, especially in the case of the most helpless. The specific character of her activity, which is very important for her, concerns precisely the spirit of service and of charity which she draws from the Gospel.

Yet the action of Christians does not consist first of all in these specific works or institutions. While respecting the competences of the State which has the duty of creating or guaranteeing the conditions of the common good, the Church wishes to contribute to the formation of the conscience of the citizens, especially of her baptized faithful, whether adults or young students in the public schools. In this way, they will be able, while professing their faith in worship and prayer, to contribute to finding an answer to the immense material and spiritual needs of their fellow countrymen, in accordance with the social responsibilities which they have. How could they not desire that the problem of hunger, and in particular the problem of the provision of rice, should find its solution in better production and better distribution; that the safety of persons should be ever better ensured – that human life should be respected from its beginning, and the family favoured; that the Malagasy culture should be deepened by opening out to what is universal – that offices should be carried out in a spirit of disinterested service, with equity and truth, far from all corruption or search for personal profit; that the sense of responsibility, of active participation and of solidarity should be developed; that the urgency of promoting the convergence of endeavours towards the priorities should harmonize with the dynamism of private initiatives; and that the dignity of the human person should always be respected and furthered? Those who have the responsibility for the common good of the nation have a heavy task and need the support of all; they are not unaware that it is such values that permit the construction of the just and brotherly society to which all aspire. They have, therefore, nothing to fear from endeavours which are undertaken with this goal, with means which respect their authority and appeal to the conscience. It is in this sense that the permanent commission of the Malagasy bishops published their letter of 8 February 1986, and the Holy See can but approve and encourage them in this. It is completely clear that they have acted as sons of their nation, with the clarity and firmness which belong to their moral and spiritual responsibility, inspired – by love for their native land and for all their fellow citizens.

4. On the international level, the democratic Republic of Madagascar has happily taken its place in the family of peoples, and you, Mr. Ambassador, have emphasized on this point some principles that are dear to the Holy See. Indeed, priority must be given to the struggle against misery and hunger, to the protection of the rights of individuals and of peoples, without forgetting their duties, and to the development of the Third World, to equality in relationships, and to the solidarity without which peace would be illusory and precarious. The fact that peace has its place within the structure of the liberty of peoples makes it all the more appreciated: it is compatible with aid that is ever more necessary, but aid that is fair and respects the dignity and the responsibility of the peoples. The Government of Madagascar has expressed its preference for a multilateral diplomacy which permits it to diversify its relations in a policy of non-alignment. It is the desire of the Holy See that the land may benefit from this, and may be able to develop all of its potential in a realistic manner, while making the contribution of the Malagasy wisdom to the other countries of the Indian Ocean, of Africa or of the world: this wisdom helps to overcome the obstacles to peace and justice by means that are in harmony with reason and work for the good of others, in freedom from all ideology.

For my part, I express my fervent wishes for the human and spiritual progress of your land, and I pray God to inspire your fellow countrymen and those who govern them to seek this progress sincerely. May all the Malagasy people be assured of the esteem and affection of the Pope, who follows their endeavours with sympathy!

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