



The Holy See

*ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER PAUL VI TO THE AMBASSADOR OF DAHOMEY ACCREDITED TO THE HOLY SEE**

Thursday, 8 November 1973

Mr. Ambassador,

Your mission as Representative of Dahomey to the Holy See begins with this official ceremony today. Our first words will be to bid you welcome. We are happy to receive you. We appreciate your conception of your task and we assure you that you will find here the hearing and the understanding indispensable to carry it out well.

You bring with you the greetings of the President of the Republic and the good wishes of the Government of Dahomey. The courtesy of these high Authorities is an additional reason for us to hope that the bonds uniting the Holy See with your country will be strengthened. To these already trusting relations is added the particular affection we bear the Dahomeans. You will be able to testify to it to His Excellency Lt. Col. Mathieu Kerekou who sent you, transmitting to him the expression of our gratitude for the good wishes you conveyed.

Your kind address, Mr. Ambassador, was particularly careful to point out, among the efforts of the Catholic Church, those that are in your opinion most appreciated in Dahomey. You mentioned especially the various interventions we thought it our duty to make from the beginning of our Pontificate, in favour of development and the progressive establishment of greater economic and social justice. There you touched upon a subject that is especially near our heart, for the possibility of increasing one's goods, the way of distributing them and distributing responsibilities and work, have serious repercussions on the whole at human life: they must not become a source of discriminations between the peoples or between social classes.

In this field, our evangelical mission obliges us incessantly to remind rulers and even mere citizens, whether Christians or not, of the clear-sightedness and generosity that make a nation

great; on the one hand to use really for the happiness of these inhabitants as a whole all the resources at its disposal, and on the other hand to establish a kind of sharing, or better still to help each State to provide itself with the conditions of its own development. Thus in face of the multiple tensions darkening the horizon, we affirm that it is urgent to find lasting solutions in the case of an open crisis, in respect for an international Authority; but it is even better, and much more effective, to seek the real causes of these conflicts, in order to avoid the possible effects in time. Since we are given the opportunity here, we maintain that beyond this merely realistic motivation there must gradually take form another conviction: all men are brothers; what real interest commands acquires new force in this maxim, so dear to Christians.

We also noted in your remarks the tribute paid to the beneficial action of zealous and courageous missionaries, who have been expending their energies unstintingly in the service of Dahomey and its inhabitants for years. We are very appreciative of this testimony of Your Excellency. The evangelical seed has germinated in tilled soil. Today, if the collaboration of these apostles is still very useful, if their generosity finds abundant outlet in the pursuit of numerous educational, social and evangelizing tasks, as well as in the development of the ancestral riches of the African soul, the Church has taken on a new face in Dahomey. You have hailed the advent of a native episcopate and clergy, responsible for the local Christian communities. We also attach great importance to the rise of a laity aware of its duties, and to the awakening of religious and catechetical vocations, already perceptible. It is the sign of a living Church, in which the various ministries are taken over more and more by the inhabitants of the country. In this way one of the essential arms of our Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples – one of the main leaders of which you recalled in the person of Mons. Bernardin Gantin – reaches attainment. This means that we confidently envisage the religious vitality of the Catholics of Dahomey, and their fruitful participation in the effort of all their fellow-countrymen for the greater good of the country.

Allow us to conclude, Mr. Ambassador, by offering you our most fervent wishes for your mission, and invoking the blessings of the Almighty abundantly on yourself, and on your noble country and its rulers. Let all Dahomeans, this day, feel particularly dear to our heart! Through you, we tell them again of our esteem and affection.

*ORa n.47 p.9.