



The Holy See

***DISCOURS DU PAPE JEAN-PAUL II
AU NOUVEL AMBASSADEUR DU BÉNIN
PRÈS LE SAINT-SIÈGE****

Vendredi, 4 janvier 1985

I thank you most heartily for the noble thoughts which you have expressed just now in presenting your Letters of Credence. Your words give us confidence in the accomplishment of the mission which you begin today as Ambassador to the Holy See. For my part, I assure Your Excellency of the cordial welcome which you will always receive in this house when it is a question of seeking together and in sincerity the greater good of the people of Benin or of ensuring for the Church in Benin opportunities of life and action, and of contributing to the progress of peaceful and harmonious relations between nations.

I also want to thank His Excellency President Mathieu Kerekou for the kind thoughts which he asked you to convey to me. You may assure him of the lasting recollection which I have of our meeting in Cotonou, and of my good wishes for all of his fellow citizens and for those who have the responsibility for the common good of the nation.

Yes, in visiting your country, early three years ago now, I wanted to pay homage to the people of Benin and to the best in its traditions, and to express in a special way the esteem in which it is held by the Holy See. I wanted to offer my encouragement to all those in your country who are trying to contribute to true social and moral progress, through respect of consciences and of religious allegiances.

Naturally, I wanted then, as I still do now, to encourage especially my fellow Catholics who form such an important group in your nation. The Holy See is proud of that portion of the universal Church which is found in Benin where, for one hundred and twenty years, the graft of the Gospel has caused new fruits to be produced on this tree nourished by African sap. And now we see these fruits of Benin carrying their perfume to other countries and even to the Roman Curia. It is

natural that the Pope should help his brothers and sisters throughout the world to grow in our common faith.

This is what I did in Cotonou, where I also pointed out the requirements of this Christian dignity which is of help to all of society: «Simplicity of life, uprightness, purity, justice, peace, courage, and above all else, love», which must permeate «the daily relationships of persons with each other and with God, of groups with each other, in families and in society». And I invited my brothers and sisters to have «clear ideas about materialism and that immoderate anxiety about money which not only puts the soul at risk, but damages social relationships, encourages falsehood, corrupts the professional conscience, weakens the sense of duty... destroys the sense of the common good and that openness in human relationships which is so dear to the people of Benin (Homely of 17 February 1982).

These are values which are dear to Christians as well as to others who believe in God, and to all persons of good will, all of whom are conscious that without them society would deteriorate. Such is the service to mankind which Your Excellency has so well underlined and which is all the better guaranteed when citizens are respected and encouraged in their attachment to spiritual values, in conformity with their conscience, their faith, and their religious community. For its part, the Church considers it a duty not only to organize meetings of prayer and worship for its members. but to transmit the faith to them by having the means to educate them in the basic human and religious values. I am happy to hear you say that the State of Benin esteems these values and wants to safeguard religious freedom along with the other fundamental human rights, for it is certainly one of the tests of man's authentic progress in any regime. In this context also are greatly appreciated the measures of amnesty which give to all your fellow citizens without distinction the chance of cooperating freely in the life of the nation

The recent feast of Christmas was an occasion for me to reaffirm the Church's preferential option for the poor, by specifying the criteria of both poverty and wealth which can ennoble the human heart. It seems to me that this ideal is faithfully carried out in Benin by many who belong to various religious groups and who devote themselves to comforting and bringing to better living conditions the poor, the sick, the lepers, the elderly, the children, in short, all those who are the most deprived of attention, resources. knowledge, capabilities, hope. This is being done especially by Catholics, in hospitals, in dispensaries, and through preparation for the duties of family life which the Church considers of prime importance for the good of society and the practice of the social virtues. Your Excellency has noted that such services cannot but be encouraged by the civil Authorities.

«To seek what is true, good and just in a determined and effective commitment at the service of the individual and of society» corresponds, you have said, to the hopes of your country. The real friends of Benin are those who work with you and for you in bringing about this ideal and in educating its citizens to it, in loyalty to their faith and out of love for their country. Can there be any

doubt that these considerations will lead to a better understanding between the Church and the State of Benin, in mutual respect, as well as to the preservation and improvement of loyal and fruitful relationships between the Holy See and – the People's Republic of Benin?

It is in this spirit, as I renew my best wishes for your country, that I pray to the Most High for its happy destiny. And for you, Mr. Ambassador, I hope that you will serve your country well in the accomplishment of the very special diplomatic mission which has been entrusted to you.

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