



The Holy See

***DISCOURS DU PAPE JEAN-PAUL II
AU NOUVEL AMBASSADEUR D'ÉTHIOPIE
PRÈS LE SAINT-SIÈGE****

Jeudi, 10 janvier 1985

1. The Holy See is glad to see you take your place here today as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary in the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See, a place which has been empty for some time. And I have no doubt that this event corresponds to a desire of your Government to strengthen the ties which have for a long time existed between Ethiopia and the Holy See. Please express to your President, His Excellency Lieutenant-Colonel Mengistu Hailé Mariam, my gratitude for the good wishes which you have transmitted and my own good wishes for your country and for those who have the heavy responsibility of caring for its welfare.

2. The Holy See's esteem and sympathy for Ethiopia increase when it considers your country's long and glorious history, parallel to biblical history. It knows of the stubborn efforts of your country, repeated again and again over several thousand years, in the face of internal difficulties and in spite of foreign interventions, to safeguard the identity of its civilization and the ties among its provinces each of which has its own particular cultural riches. Even though the Catholic faithful in your country form only a small minority - an active one and very attached to its native land - the Catholic Church nevertheless feels an affinity with the faith and the spiritual witness of the Coptic Orthodox Church of Ethiopia, which has so profoundly marked the soul of the country, its customs and its art. As she expressed it in the Second Vatican Council, the Church also regards with respect and good will all those who profess their faith in the one God, and those who follow the voice of conscience and sincerely seek the welfare of their neighbour. This means that the Church does not consider any human society truly foreign; rather, she regards each one with fraternal concern.

3. Your Excellency has emphasized certain ideals common to the Holy See and Ethiopia, concerning how to conceive the well being of this nation or international relations. In what

concerns us, I can give you this assurance, to which many countries could testify: in its declarations as in its actions the Holy See desires the independence of every country, as I said last year when I received the diplomatic corps. The Holy See wishes that the sovereignty of each country should be recognized and respected by all the others, without interference, direct or disguised; that international aid itself should respect the civilization and the original way which each country wants to safeguard according to the wish of the people. The Holy See considers as essential the acknowledgement and exercise of fundamental human rights, liberty, respect for the spiritual values which belong to the culture of a country; and the guarantee that all citizens can profess and live their religious faith according to the requirements of their community.

4. The Holy See is equally attached to those things which establish and develop justice among men and among social groups, recognizing an equal dignity in each person of whatever sex, race, nationality or religion. Likewise the Holy See values that which promotes people's responsibility according to their talents, respecting and serving the common good. The Holy See is convinced that the practice of justice is the most solid foundation for establishing and maintaining peace, that peace, interior and exterior, which is so necessary in order to undertake true reforms, to face vital needs, and to allow citizens to come to a prosperity which provides a level of nutrition, health, and education which conforms with their dignity. The Holy See is not unaware that this peace can be threatened by unjust violence and that it is proper to defend peace in the common interest; but we think that one must always try to replace violence with negotiated solutions, just and honourable ones, taking account of the legitimate demands of the parties involved; for violence engenders violence, and it leads to ruin. Such are the ideals which the Holy See proclaims in a clear voice; it seeks to promote them among all friendly countries. It hopes to arouse the acquiescence of the greatest possible number of them by a reasonable evaluation of the true interests of the peoples and by an appeal to conscience.

5. At this moment Ethiopia is living out a great drama, like many countries of Africa: the drama of a drought which is becoming even more severe and which brings famine in its train. Here and there armed conflicts continue to prevent solutions to the problem. Millions of people are suffering from this vital lack of food. They will remain marked by it for a long time, while thousands of them die each day, among them a large number of children. Throughout the world international organizations, governments, and aid agencies have been moved and are organizing help to meet the immediate need, while hoping to see the implementation of long-term solutions. How could the Pope not raise his voice to echo and amplify this appeal? Through the Pontifical Council Cor Unum, through Caritas organizations, through many initiatives the Catholic Church thus participates on site in this work of solidarity, as you have had the goodness to emphasize. She is ready to continue and to develop this humanitarian action to the extent that her means - alas too limited - permit, for the benefit of all the starving populations, without distinction of religion or allegiance.

The Church is grateful to the Ethiopian government for the confidence which it has in her with

regard to these aid distribution efforts.

But, as your Excellency well knows, such participation in emergency aid, conforming as it does to that charity which is at the heart of the Christian message, does not express the total contribution which the Church offers to the world. As I mentioned above, the Church wants to work to advance the good of human beings, integrally and jointly, wherever men trust her, respecting the persons and institutions with which each country is endowed: she favours the development of everything which ensures the dignity of persons, their health, education, culture, family values, social justice and fraternity, moral integrity, their relationship with God himself. This shows the importance which the Church accords to education, to which she gladly devotes her efforts. As regards her spiritual mission through the witness of her children and the international action of the Holy See, she has this ambition: that everywhere men and women may be better prepared for the responsibility which they must exercise, with competence and in a spirit of impartial service, for the good of their fellow countrymen and for the common good of all nations. May all men and women of good will come together in this common endeavour!

This, Mr. Ambassador, is what you will witness in the special relations which you will from now on have with the Holy See, in the name of your Government. And you yourself will share with us the problems and desires of your compatriots, in the assurance that the Holy See wishes the greatest good of your nation and of all those who form it in their diversity. We entrust this mutual openness to the grace of God who probes the will and inspires upright hearts. And I offer you, Mr. Ambassador, my wishes for a happy and a fruitful mission.

**L'Osservatore Romano. Weekly Edition in English n.7 p.9.*

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