



The Holy See

*Discurso al Embajador del CONGO,
Excmo. Sr. Don Jean-Marie EWENGUE**

18 de noviembre de 1985

Mr. Ambassador,

1. I thank you for the kind words with which you are inaugurating your mission as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Peoples' Republic of the Congo to the Holy See. They reveal the sentiments of freedom for service with which you are assuming your task.

As for me, I am happy to receive you here. The charge that Your Excellency is assuming will henceforth ensure the maintenance of a useful and fruitful dialogue, which your country and the Holy See have desired to establish by diplomatic relations.

As you yourself said, it is a matter of reinforcing, at the official and diplomatic level, the relations of mutual respect, esteem, friendship and cooperation which already exist, at the international level, between the people of Congo with its leaders and the Apostolic See, and which inevitably affect the relations between the Church and the State within the Peoples' Republic of the Congo itself. The bonds well strengthened in a concrete and cordial way at the time of the visit I was able to make to your country on 5 May 1980: I always remember with emotion the courtesy with which His Excellency Colonel Denis Sassou-Nguesso offered me generous hospitality and cooperated in the realization of a very packed programme, the enthusiasm with which the people of the Congo welcomed me, the fervour with which the Catholic community prayed with me. Once again today I express my gratitude for this reception.

2. I understand and respect the concerns of your Government, which, like every State, must exercise the sovereignty of the nation, guarantee its independence, ensure the conditions which will allow the realization of the common good of the entire human community of the Congo. You mentioned the struggle against poverty, sickness, ignorance and hunger, plagues which the

countries of the Third World experience with particular acuteness. Yes, this is a heavy task, and one which can scarcely be accomplished unless the other countries of the continent or of the planet, in particular those most favoured with material goods show a concern for sharing, for equity and for justice, while respecting your liberty and your sovereignty. The service of the common good requires likewise, within the country itself, the loyal and courageous cooperation of all the citizens, of all the social and ethnic groups: they will offer this all the more willingly in that they feel that their well-being is truly being sought, with regard to their fundamental rights as persons and as families which the State has as its mission to serve.

3. Although the Church is distinct from the State in virtue of its spiritual nature and end – which also call for social expression, as I underlined in the presence of your President at Brazzaville – you know, Mr Ambassador, that the Church takes very much to heart this service of man, including the concrete conditions which assure him a decent life, nourishment, health, education, dignity. And it encourages Christians to cooperate to this end with all their might, in their own countries or, in virtue of the principle of solidarity, with the less favoured peoples. The spirit which their faith invites them to engage in these domains – as you rightly brought out several times – is one of tolerance, in the form of respect for others, of justice, of peace, and above all of love which inspires all the other virtues and effectively stimulates the desirable common efforts. It is not only the Pope and the bishops who wish to give witness of this as Pastors of the Church, but the entire Christian people; they wish also to contribute to the education of consciences in this sense; they hope for a moral progress in this regard for the life of individuals, for the stability and the growth of families – which always have such an important role to play – for the equity and harmony of social relationships, so that hatred violence, deceit may be banished and just order and integral human development promoted, as I called for in my homily at Brazzaville

4. These moral values, necessary to the well-being and to the progress of the people, are without doubt appreciated and lived by many of your compatriots, as consonant with their understanding or consistent with the religion to which they belong. In the case of Christians, they are founded, illustrated, reinforced by their faith, by the example of Christ and the doctrine of his Church. It is obviously of prime concern for them that they be able to adhere freely to their faith – you yourself, Mr Ambassador, insisted on this religious liberty and I am grateful to you for this – but also that they have access to the means for nourishing this faith, for supporting it, for expressing it publicly, as a firm conviction, founded on profound reasons, as a vital attitude which touches the fundamental orientation of their life in its relationship with God, Creator and source of every good. They know that man does not live on bread alone, and that the essence of an individual, as of a people is its soul.

In these areas, the Holy See is convinced that it is possible to develop, in the People's Republic of the Congo, a serene and constructive climate that would correspond to truth and prove beneficial to both parties.

5. Finally, on the question of international relations, Your Excellency pointed out that the efforts of the Holy See for a more just world coincide with the struggle of the poor countries. I am touched by this witness. We certainly do insist always on the importance of more equitable relations among all the countries of the world, on the necessity of setting in motion a genuine solidarity aimed at eliminating the spectre of hunger and allowing a development of the less favoured countries that would keep pace with their primary needs, as also on the climate of peace and of respect for rights that should dominate these efforts. The homily of 10 November before the delegates to the Meeting of FAO afforded me the opportunity of reaffirming this intention of the Holy See, which meets the concerns of the people of the Congo.

Mr Ambassador, it has been a pleasure for me to express to you our understanding and to formulate cordial good wishes for the well being of your compatriots and the task of your leaders. I thank His Excellency President Denis Sassou-Nguesso for the homage he commissioned you to convey. And as for you personally, I wish you a happy and fruitful mission.

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