



The Holy See

*Discurso al Embajador de FRANCIA,
Excmo. Sr. Don René ALA**

13 de septiembre de 1991

Mr. Ambassador,

1. In presenting to me the Letters which accredit you to the Holy See as Ambassador of the French Republic, you expressed the meaning and importance of your mission in warm and well-chosen words, and for this I thank you. I was sensitive to the manner in which you noted your attention to certain essential orientations of my ministry and to the many concerns of the Holy See.

In welcoming Your Excellency today, I am happy to receive the diplomat who will continue the activity of one of the most ancient Embassies to the Apostolic See.

With your entrance into the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See, I am sure that we will benefit from your vast experience. I especially note your experience in Lebanon, where you were close to that nation which has suffered greatly and whose future is so close to my heart.

2. Mr. Ambassador, you have called to mind the lasting influence of Christian values on the life of your nation. Indeed, France preserves the heritage of a long history which has been profoundly affected by evangelization since the first centuries of our era, by ecclesial life, the monastic presence, intellectual activity, and apostolic foundations which have been continually renewed. And these centuries of a culture permeated with Christianity have been closely tied to a conception of the human person which your people have spread throughout the world; this conception can, in a certain way, be summed up in the motto to which you referred and on which I have occasionally commented. To a great extent France deserves credit for the awareness, which has been most intense during recent generations, of human rights, of the human person's inalienable dignity and of his duties as well. And one rejoices in seeing that the protection of these rights continues to spread and to have greater influence in international life.

Our meeting gives me the welcome opportunity to express my cordial wishes for your countrymen, with a special mention for those among them who are suffering economic difficulties at this time, particularly in regard to employment. I hope that the people of France will fully live the fraternity which that motto proclaims between generations, among persons of different social and educational backgrounds, and between their fellow citizens and foreigners. I hope that France will remain faithful to the values which have characterized her culture throughout her history on the intellectual level, in the domain of social and family ethics and in her art of living.

3. Of course, Mr. Ambassador, I would like to express my feelings of affection and esteem for the Catholic Church in France. First of all, how could I not recall at this time the noble figure of Cardinal Henri de Lubac who has just departed from us? In his person he brings together the best qualities which one finds among the Catholics of France: his great learning, his solid thought, his openness to the modern world and to other spiritual cultures, his sense of the Church and the intensity of his interior life; and I cannot fail to mention his perceptiveness and courage during the dark hours of the Second World War.

A renowned past, an apostolic and intellectual influence abroad: all of this has not spared French Catholics the experience of many trials in our time. I would like to pay homage to the pastoral sense and self-denial of pastors, priests and religious, as well as to the dedication of Christian lay people, who give life to their communities and who increase their constructive activities. Numerous dioceses continue the active dialogues of their synods, a sign of vitality and the best collaboration among the different groups which make up local communities.

I know that the Catholic Church is highly esteemed in your country and most often enjoys good relations with the authorities and with her fellow citizens belonging to other traditions. She is glad to make her contribution to the common good, as well as to the generous cooperation that your country pursues abroad with other nations which are much less advantaged. And I hope that in the type of pluralistic society which your country enjoys the members of the Church may be able to continue to participate in the great debates, to guarantee the religious formation and general education of their children in good conditions and to be respected in regard to their convictions, as they respect those of their fellow citizens.

4. In international life, the Holy See has many concerns which she has shared with the members of the Diplomatic Corps, particularly with the Representative of France. You have mentioned the situation in Europe. Concern for peace is unfortunately the most immediate: we hope that the collaboration of all the nations of the continent, particularly in the context of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, will allow peoples who are dear to us to overcome the tensions and deadly conflicts which have painfully marked these past weeks.

We also hope that the solidarity of the whole continent, which is becoming more united, will permit

the nations which have recently regained their freedom to strengthen their institutions, develop their economies and intensify their relations with the rest of the world in every domain. You alluded to the Synod which I have called for Europe: this assembly should give a new impulse to fruitful exchanges in the spiritual domain among the particular Churches, as well as to the ecumenical dialogue. In a general way, it is now necessary to re-establish an advantageous harmony among different peoples who are respected in regard to their own identity, without forgetting that they are experiencing a lessening in the disparities of their conditions of life, the consequence of decades of oppression in one whole part of the continent.

Your diplomatic career led to your working, as I mentioned a moment ago among the Lebanese people, who have been associated with your country for centuries, and for whom I feel a deep affection, reinforced by the long suffering which we have unfortunately had to witness, frequently without being able to bring them any effective support. But our fraternal efforts will not cease, and we hope that the international community will help this people to regain a lasting peace, to maintain ownership of their own land and to build a secure future. Your presence at the Holy See will without a doubt contribute to making one aware of the lot of this beloved people. And, as you yourself observed, at the same time we cannot forget all the inhabitants of the Near and Middle East particularly those who live in the Land to which all who believe in the one God are so attached and which was made holy by the incarnation of Jesus Christ. We want peace and prosperity for everyone.

Mr. Ambassador, you also wanted to mention the interventions I have had to make on behalf of the peoples of the Third World, particularly in Africa. Your country, as you said, is closely tied to many of them. Permit me today to express my ardent desire to see greater cooperation between the countries of the North and those of the South, cooperation whose ways and means must be ceaselessly improved, so that young people, who are energetic but poor, may be able to develop their resources, to provide work for their sons and daughters, to maintain the health of the children and adults, to provide the education and the professional training without which their progress cannot be permanently guaranteed, and to strengthen the public institutions which allow each nation to develop its particular qualities and to participate fully in the life of the international community. I know that your country is working for this with generosity, either through the action of public authorities or through the initiative of dynamic non governmental organizations; and I hope that the achievement of concrete solidarity with the countries of the Third World will not be delayed by the new situation on the European continent, which will derive no relatively long-term benefit from turning in on itself, something which is contrary to the interests of all humanity.

5. To conclude our conversation, Mr. Ambassador, I first of all want to ask you to convey to His Excellency, the President of the French Republic, my respectful greetings and tell him how greatly I appreciate his desire to maintain constructive relations with the Apostolic See. The common concerns which we have just mentioned will certainly characterize the mission which you are beginning today and I wish you success in accomplishing it. I can assure you that you will be given

a thoughtful reception by my collaborators and the assistance which you will desire.

I hope that you and your family will derive much satisfaction from your stay in Rome. I gladly invoke the blessing of God on you, your loved ones and your collaborators.

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