



The Holy See

*Discours au premier Ambassadeur du GABON,
S.E.M. Giovanni Davin**

Jeudi 17 octobre 1968

Mr. Ambassador,

It is with joy that We bid you welcome to the Vatican and that We receive in your person the first official Representative sent by Gabon to Us. As you have just said, the delivery of your Letters of Credence into our hands marks a historic date, a happy one, We think, both for the Holy See and for your young Republic.

The good relations that the Catholic Church maintains with your Country do not date just from today. The Apostolic Vicariate, then known as the Vicariate "of the two Guineas", has existed since the time of Our Predecessor Gregory XVI. It comprised, inter alia, the territory of present-day Gabon, which was entrusted by the Pontiff to the young Congregation founded for the apostolate of Negroes by the Venerable Francis Liberman. The first missionaries landed on the coasts of Gabon in 1844, and then there began, amid the delays and ordeals that are part of every apostolic enterprise, the history of the gradual penetration of the evangelical seed in your Country. Now, more than a century later, everyone can see that it has taken firm root. The work of the Fathers of the Holy Ghost, soon assisted by the Brothers of St. Gabriel and by several female communities, has won recognition and has developed; and Gabon, with its two hundred and fifty thousand Christians – half, it can be said, of the total population of the Country – offers the spectacle of a flourishing Christian life today.

Alongside the heralds of the Gospel, it would be just to cite also the intrepid explorers thanks to whom, later on, your Country began to acquire its repute among non-African peoples. A particular reason invites Us to mention one of them here; the most famous of them, undoubtedly: Saverghan de Brazza, Italian by birth, later naturalized French, who was born at Castel Gandolfo, a few steps front the summer residence of the Popes.

But Your Excellency's visit prompts Us to turn towards the present, now, rather than towards the past. Aware of its personality and of its national unity, Gabon has now taken its destiny into its own hands. Harmony reigns, as far as We know, between Catholics and those who profess a different faith, and We like to think that, among the inhabitants of Gabon, Our sons are not the last to set an example of loyalty towards the Authorities of the Country.

The latter, as you rightly recalled, appreciate the principles of moral and spiritual order that inspire the Holy See and they are anxious to promote two great causes to which the Holy See gives its support, deeming them essential for a happy future for mankind: the cause of peace and that of development. The two causes are linked, and peace – at home and abroad – depends to a considerable extent on a fair distribution by the Governments of the national riches at all levels of the population, whether it be material or cultural riches. Such is, we think, the concern of the Authorities of Gabon, and We can see a happy sign of this in the considerable effort they are making, with the help of the Church, on the plane of education. They have also done honour to themselves, in the field of aid, by recently welcoming a number of innocent victims of the tragedy that is laying waste a neighbouring State.

Your Excellency expressed the hope that the relations inaugurated today will develop successfully. We can assure you that this desire is fully shared here, and that, in the exercise of your mission, you will always find understanding and support on Our part. We lovingly invoke the abundance of divine blessings on you and your family, as well as on the Authorities and the people of Gabon.

*ORa n.31 p.2.